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**MEXICO:**  
*Magnetic Southland*

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# MEXICO:

## *Magnetic Southland*

BY

SYDNEY A. CLARK

*With Illustrations and Maps*

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

NEW YORK

1944

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## *Contents*

<b>MAP FOREWORD</b>	<b>PAGE IX</b>
<b>THE FOREGROUND OF THE PICTURE</b>	
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>I WHAT COLOR, PROFIT?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II TRAVEL LINES OF LEAST RESISTANCE</b>	<b>8</b>
A. The Wings of Today and Tomorrow. B. The Poly-American Highway.	
<b>III MONEY IN MEXICO</b>	<b>20</b>
A. Preview of Prices. B. The Designer's Message. C. Tips Without Worry.	
<b>IV TREMENDOUS TRIVIA</b>	<b>28</b>
A. Advisers in Advance. B. Border Barriers Lowered. C. Altitude Gremlins. D. Guides, Philosophers and Friends.	
<b>THE BACKGROUND OF THE PICTURE</b>	
<b>V A PAGEANT IN FOUR PARTS</b>	<b>39</b>
A. Aboriginal Marvels of Mexico. B. The Impact of Spain. C. From Independence to Freedom. D. The Colors of Revolution.	
<b>YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE</b>	
<b>VI MEXICO CITY, CENTER OF EVERYTHING</b>	<b>73</b>
A. Candid Notes on Hotels. B. Big City Practicalities. C. Five Foci for Americans. D. Shoppers in Paradise.	



## CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER

PAGE

XV	GLAMOR AT GUADALAJARA	184
	A. Delights of Plaza and Portales. B. Temptation at Tlaquepaque. C. A Day for Lake Chapala.	
XVI	ALLURING TOWNS OF INDEPENDENCE	189
	A. Freedom's Cast of Characters. B. Querétaro, Birthplace of the Plan. C. San Miguel, A Patriot's Hearth. D. Guanajuato Silver.	
XVII	THE SIRENS OF THE SOUTH	204
	A. The Call of Cuernavaca. B. Taxco the Incomparable. C. Acapulco in her Bathing Suit.	
XVIII	TO PUEBLA AND THE FORT OF FLOWERS	217
	A. Cholula and its Calendar of Churches. B. The Weathered Wealth of Puebla. C. Fortín, a Floral Millionaire.	
XIX	WONDERS OF OAXACA	226
	A. Plaza Life at its Best. B. Two Double Stars for Strolling. C. Monte Alban and Mitla.	
XX	THE LODESTONE OF MEMORY	235





## MAP FOREWORD

### *Notes for "Skyways and Highways of Mexico"*

THE cartographer's dilemma is the traveler's good news. A transportation map of Mexico, ambitious to be up to the minute, cannot hope to keep pace with the rapid advancement, especially of air services and highways. In both of these fields a brilliant future is seen, perhaps at the expense of train travel, which now lags in Mexico; and both are taking due advantage of the trend of the times.

Skyways already form an intricate pattern, more or less as spokes of a wheel whose hub is Mexico City. Two lesser hubs of lesser wheels are Guadalajara and Oaxaca. Several of the Mexican air lines (but not Pan-American's affiliate, C.M.A.) still use one-motor planes with seating capacity of four to ten passengers, but these eagerly expanding companies are gradually securing bigger and better planes. The various services, both American and Mexican, are discussed in Chapter 2.

Improvements in all the services will be spectacular. We may confidently expect that the Air Age into which we are entering will quickly outmode all present standards. The most luxurious clippers and strato-clippers now in use will seem like funny little old-fashioned ships when compared with the flying giants that are already beyond the blueprint stage. The development will be an exciting thing to watch and Mexico will be a perfect place in which to watch it—and share in it.

Highways are no less exciting than skyways and those of Mexico are a distinct surprise—on the favorable side—to most

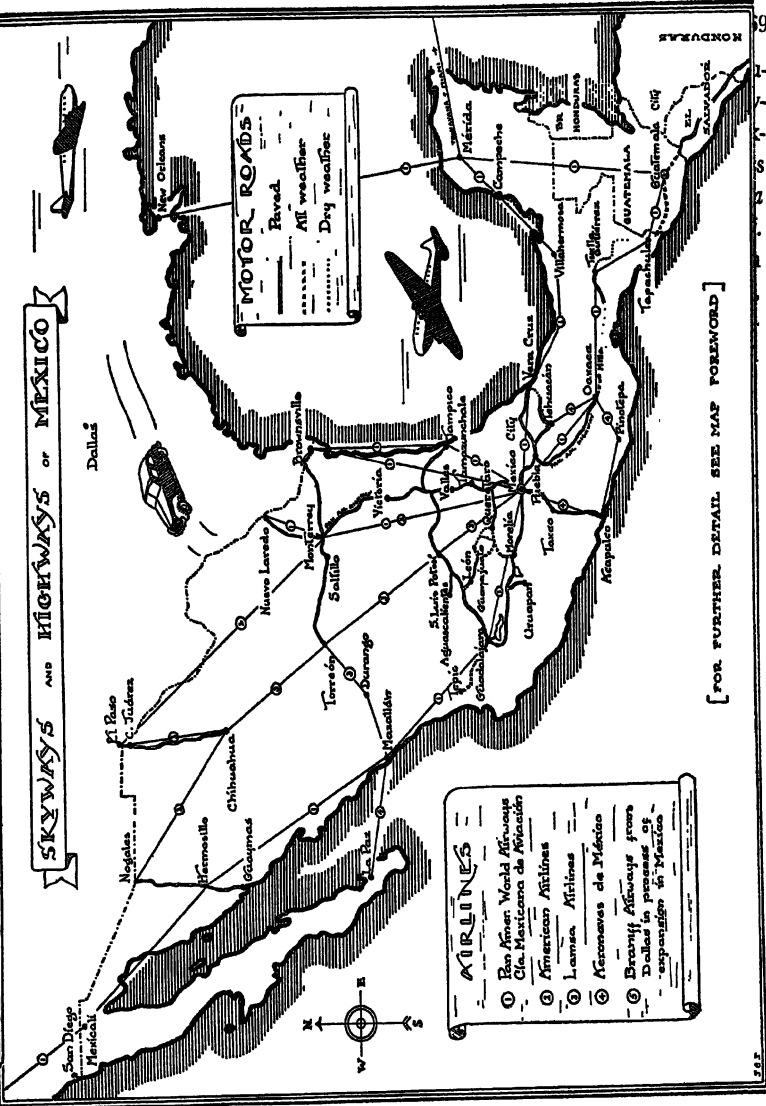
American visitors, for the Mexican government takes the national road-building program very seriously. Only Argentina and Peru, among Latin lands, have done as well as Mexico in this respect.

The superb Pan-American Highway is, of course, the main stem of international travel and it now provides boulevard motoring for 1100 miles from Laredo to Mexico City to Oaxaca. For a time it seemed that the long gaps in the extreme south portion of Mexico, between Oaxaca and the Guatemala frontier, might be closed by 1944 but the military necessity for a road from the States to the Canal Zone faded and consequently the work faded. Mexico now prefers that this great project should take its proper place, important but not exclusively so, in the national road program. We may expect that the highway will be completed before 1950 but perhaps not much before that. Meanwhile, one may send one's car by train to Guatemala and drive on from that point.

Mexico City is the hub of motor travel as of air travel. Four really great national highways, completely paved, fan out to the four points of the compass and the recent trans-Mexico road (likewise paved) tying Guadalajara to the Pan-American Highway now makes a circular motor tour practical for the first time. Macadam surfacing (but very little of cement) is advancing rapidly but, meanwhile, the all-weather roads are generally dependable. Dry-weather roads are for winter motoring only and one must not expect much even then.

Honest and conscientious information as to the current condition of roads and their expected development can be secured from PEMEX, No. 116 Avenida Artículo 123, Mexico City. (Compare Chapter 2.)

# SKYWAYS AND HIGHWAYS OF MEXICO



**MOTOR ROADS**

Raved  
 All weather  
 Dry weather

**AIRLINES**

① Pan American Airways  
 ② Mexican Airlines  
 ③ American Airlines  
 ④ Laramie Airlines  
 ⑤ Aeromexico de Mexico  
 ⑥ Braniff Airways from  
 Dallas in process of  
 expansion in Mexico

[FOR FURTHER DETAIL SEE MAP FOREWORD]

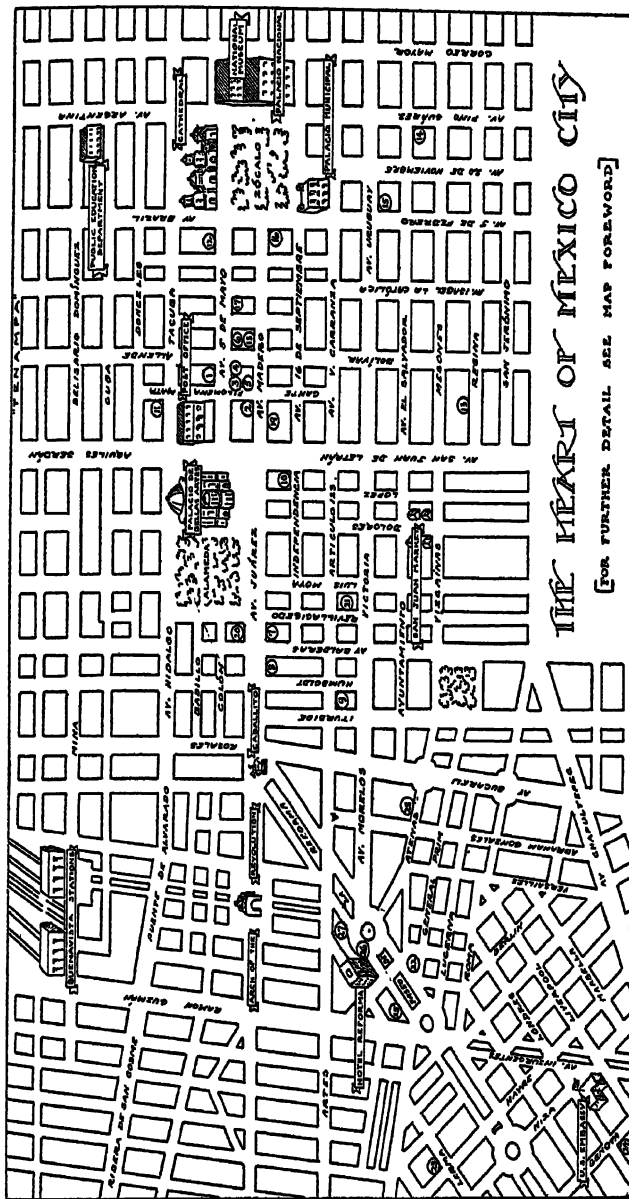
*Notes for "The Heart of Mexico City"*

A bit of advance orientation is useful in any metropolis as large as Mexico City. It happens that this particular metropolis is exceptionally concentrated for one so populous (now claiming 1,750,000 inhabitants). Almost everything downtown that is of interest to travelers is within very easy walking distance of the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Fine Arts Palace). The principal hotel quarter extends to the west of the congested center. Empress Carlotta's magnificent boulevard, Paseo de la Reforma, running straight from downtown to Chapultepec Castle, is the central trunk of transient life. A main branch from the Paseo is Avenida Insurgentes, centering more hotels and tourist rooms. This is the embassy sector, too, and the United States Embassy and Consulate General are among those located here.

Night life of the attractive sort huddles around the central part of the Paseo, with Hotel Reforma as its heart. Since 1942, this night sector has developed enormously, becoming one of the gayest and most pretentious in the world. It used to be said that Mexico City went to bed early "because of the altitude," but international patronage, led by the Almighty Dollar, quite suddenly altered its habits until it now performs prodigies of nightly revelry.

*Notes for "Luxury in Mexico"*

Mexico is a really large country in area (about four times the size of Spain) but within a radius of three or four hundred miles of the capital lies almost everything (except Yucatán) which is of chief interest to visitors. In this inner circle of travel there are now six or eight resort hotels of



# THE HEART OF MEXICO CITY

[FOR FURTHER DETAIL SEE MAP FOREWORD]

7-13

TRAVEL OFFICES	COOK'S	HO-TELS	
① American Airlines	① Pan American Information Office	① Ontario Hotel	① Emporio Hotel
② Pan Am World Airways	② PUBLIC BUREAU	② Majestic Hotel	② Maria Cristina Hotel
③ Iguala Airlines	③ Western Union Cable Office	③ Olympic Hotel	③ Genoa Hotel
④ Nat'l Railways of Mexico	④ General Telegraph Office	③ RJE Hotel	③ Nicosy Club
⑤ Valla Bongo	⑤ Mexico de Mexico (Mail Room Shop)	③ Guardiola Hotel	③ Sans Souci
⑥ Aguirre Guest House	⑤ Viceroy's Court	③ Regis Hotel	③ Ciro's (in Hotel Reforma)
⑦ Agaveva de Mexico	⑤ Hospital de Jesús	③ Lincoln Hotel	③ Club Minuit
			③ El Puma

international *grande luxe*, not to mention those in the capital itself. Two or three of them have special and undeniable character to enhance their comforting amenities. In addition to this there are at least a dozen provincial cities with hotels that are strictly first-class in furnishings, appointments and service.

American travelers are the most exigent in the world. They want what they want and will pay for it. Mexico knows this well and its hotel interests are making seven-league strides to meet the demand. Small cities like Guanajuato and small towns like San Miguel de Allende are blossoming with new, tasteful and thoroughly good inns. Food is also veering toward American tastes, for the United States palate has always been obstinate in demanding the things to which it is accustomed. Fortunately, however, this trend is not too strongly marked. It would be regrettable indeed if the offerings of Spanish Mexico, some of them wonderful, were to be edged completely off of the menu even in tourist hotels; and if the spicier offerings of Indian Mexico were not readily available to bolder "experimentalists."

Luxury in Mexico has powerful and increasing lure for Americans. This special map undertakes to show exactly where that lure will lead.

### *A Special Note on Yucatán*

This book presents Mexico as a unit of convenient travel rather than as a unit of political geography. For that reason Yucatán is not included in the text since that distant province is now closer, in travel convenience, to Guatemala than to Mexico, of which it is a political state. It happens also to be much closer racially, for the people of Yucatán and Guatemala are both almost pure Mayans and they have the com-

# LUXURY IN MEXICO

Valles

Guadalupe

S. Miguel de Allende

Tamamocah

San Juan

Acapulco

Manzanillo

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

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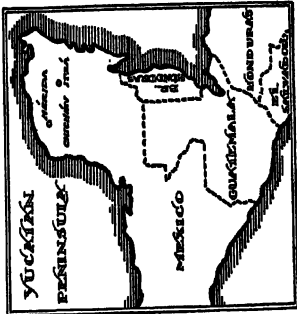
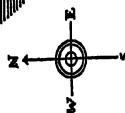
San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas

San Blas



TOWNS IN MEXICO	MEXICO	WIDE
FIRST CLASS HOTELS		
Manzanillo		
San Blas		
Chihuahua		
Guaymas		
Mazatlan		

LOCALITIES WITH DELUXE HOTELS SHOWN THIS	ACAPULCO
LOCALITIES WITH FIRST CLASS HOTELS	Puebla
OTHER TRAVEL TOWNS	

[FOR FURTHER DETAIL SEE MAP FOREWORD]

mon heritage of Mayan culture and language. Yucatán is included with Guatemala and the small countries to the south in *Central America, Chain of Enchantment* now under preparation by this author, but the airline connections of Yucatán with Mexico (there are no roads or rails) are shown on the end papers and the Skyways map of the present volume.



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## THE FOREGROUND OF THE PICTURE

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## CHAPTER I

### *What Color, Profi?*

A FRIEND of mine is Profesora to the children of a Mexican mine owner near Taxco. They were much excited when she told them that I was writing a book about their country and Alvarito in particular was a jumping question mark. He concentrated all of his six years of curiosity into one burning query, "Tell me, Profi—*what color will it be?*" She said she really didn't know, but he was not to be put off. "I mean what *color*, Profi? Will it be black or white—or poorruple?"

She took the question directly to me but I was as uninformed as she. If one could run through the color chart and say "This is Mexico," one would achieve a major miracle. The color of Mexico attacks the eye with ruthless force and a bewildering variety of unexpected aggressions. The street and market scenes are a perpetual riot of escaped pigments. The roadside and even railroadside life is a *mélange* of everything that would be unimaginable north of the Rio Grande. The park and plaza life is by all odds the most appealing to be found in this hemisphere for every Mexican town, however uninspired, has its lovely central plaza, presumably with a cathedral façade to decorate it. And no town is so poor that it does not have at least one or two beautiful parks and a splendid *alameda*. These areas of siesta are almost invariably clean and attractive to the eye. There is generally a lot of tile work, including sumptuous fountains, decorated benches and a bandstand. Always there are trees, especially Indian

laurels of magnificent proportions and assorted tropical palms. These plazas owe their inspiration chiefly to Empress Carlotta who ordered that the existing *Plazas de Armas* all over the country be transformed into gardens of the people.

If you like pretty girls, especially those who do not know they are pretty, you may see tens of thousands of them in Mexico, for the Indian and the mestiza are *naturally* pretty and it is only the unfortunate exception who is not. The faintly Oriental cast of countenance conspires with the clear-cocoa skin and the petite figure to build remarkable eye-appeal. Almost all of the girls are short, far shorter indeed than the men of the same blood, as every visitor, from the trained ethnologist to the casual tourist, has noted. Five feet is about average for an Indian girl and many are only four feet nine or ten. They are little chocolate dolls (doomed perhaps to be dumpy in middle age) and beside them the tourist girls from the States seem huge, and our six foot glamazons look like girl-giants.

Mexico is so accessible that we can walk into it at a dozen handy points from four states and for that reason its border communities are nondescript cities and *poblaciones* chiefly concerned with offering the curious tourist—for a consideration—what he wants to find. A shoddy and totally false picture is thus imprinted upon the minds of the pedestrian and the taxi tourist. But let him or her push beyond this flimsy barrier of cheap commercialism and the reward grows greater with each minute and each mile. Most of Mexico is as alluringly foreign as if it lay below the equator. Even the capital and the luxury resorts, despite their acquired taste for the benefits of *turismo*, have by no means sold their souls to the transient dollar. They remain stubbornly, appealingly, devotedly, and sometimes irritatingly, Mexican. And

the towns, some two or three dozen of them, which boast the amenities of modern living and yet are scarcely touched by the breath of *turismo*, are among the most attractive that I, for one, have encountered in a score of years of traveling.

My enthusiasm, tintured with an aspersive adjective which crept in among the others, calls for explanation and I shall try to be completely truthful and fair, avoiding the golden glow of the indiscriminate zealot and the shrewishness of the quick-to-complain. What is the power in the magnet that is Mexico? How great and how valid is its pull?

If color is half of it, climate is the other half. The climate of Mexico is one of the most docile and predictable of any in the world, possibly surpassing in this respect even the glamorized climate of Hawaii, whose liquid sunshine can sometimes be disobediently wet. But one must distinguish sharply between Mexico's dry winter and her shower-studded summer. And one must distinguish between the high central plateau and the steamy tropical coasts.

The winter weather of the capital and all the high-altitude regions of the heart of the country is so phenomenally fine that it seems an understatement to call it merely perfect. The days are warm and bright and dry—all of them—and the nights are cool and bracing and dry. This delectable period lasts, allowing for some annual variation, from November until April. "And does it never rain in winter?" I once asked a trusted cicerone. "Never," she answered solemnly. "You mean literally that it cannot rain?" "It cannot," came the categorical answer. And the next day, which was Christmas Day, it did rain all day long. But that Christmas rain, as I learned for myself, was so rare as to be almost a phenomenon. In two subsequent winter months I saw only one brief spatter in Mexico City and it was so localized that many sectors of the capital did not get even their fair quota,

say one hundred drops. This pleasant constancy does not apply to the north of Mexico even where the altitude is high. Monterrey and Chihuahua and Saltillo can produce copious rain in December and January as in other months. But, surprisingly, the rule does apply to Acapulco and its region, despite the tropical sea-level temperature of that lovely resort. It never rains in Acapulco's winter, in fact even "more never" than in the country's capital.

Vera Cruz and the incomparable flower resort of Fortín, which is halfway up the Sierra but still in the Vera Cruz orbit, demand a special weather note. Northers of disagreeable quality and power strike this coast at occasional intervals, sending wild surf and driving rain to the port, and clammy drizzles—with some real rain—to Fortín. These are likely to arrive in winter but they are generally of short duration and if you have the ill luck to strike one while in Fortín (no one ever lingers needlessly in Vera Cruz), you should ride out the storm, confident that the reward will be enormous when the norther has blown itself out and the sun breaks through upon the trillions of flowers which the rain has nourished. Without occasional soakings such floral virtuosity as that of Fortín could not exist.

The pull of the Mexico magnet need not submit to conscientious analysis. It is something one feels rather than examines. The very faults of the country can become charms if one is in the mood to be conquered. Tardiness, for instance, becomes a rather delightful insouciance when the Mexican with whom you had an appointment at 4:00 P.M. turns up smiling and unperturbed at 5:00, explaining easily, "Of course, you know what P.M. means with us. It's *Puntualidad Mexicana*. But, really, I'm sorry to have kept you waiting." You forgive him instantly, though you know

very well that he will be just as late for the next appointment he makes.

You will fuss and fume at times. You will want to commit a slight murder when you struggle for half an hour to put through a local telephone call; or when the bus for which you have a reservation never shows up at all; or when the careful message you have left for a friend at another hotel is never delivered. But if you can induce yourself to *accept these things* as relatively mild visitations of fate, as modest taxes on the vast income of pleasure which the country offers, you will be doing yourself a great favor. The Mexico magnet will get you in the end, in any case, unless you are a miracle of resistance. You may as well, and had better, succumb at the beginning and call upon your reserves of good nature to meet the "troubles" that are certain to occur. After all, these troubles will make delightful reading in your letters to the home folk and delightful telling as you later exaggerate and build them up to proper dramatic levels for appreciative listeners.

Mexico, when all is said, is a neighbor so endowed with talents and attractions that she is easily forgiven for anything she does or leaves undone. This is especially true in the case of those visitors—and I am told by a friend in a major Mexican travel agency that their number increases each year—who realize that faults are not the monopoly of the other fellow. To many a cultured Mexican many a United States tourist still seems blatant, ill-informed, domineering, and contemptuous of anything new to him; and he seems this way because he is this way. But his conspicuous race—praise be to Saint Christopher, the patron of travel—appears to be slowly dying out. More speed to this demise. More power to the thoughtful, considerate, informed and patient element in *turismo*.

## CHAPTER II

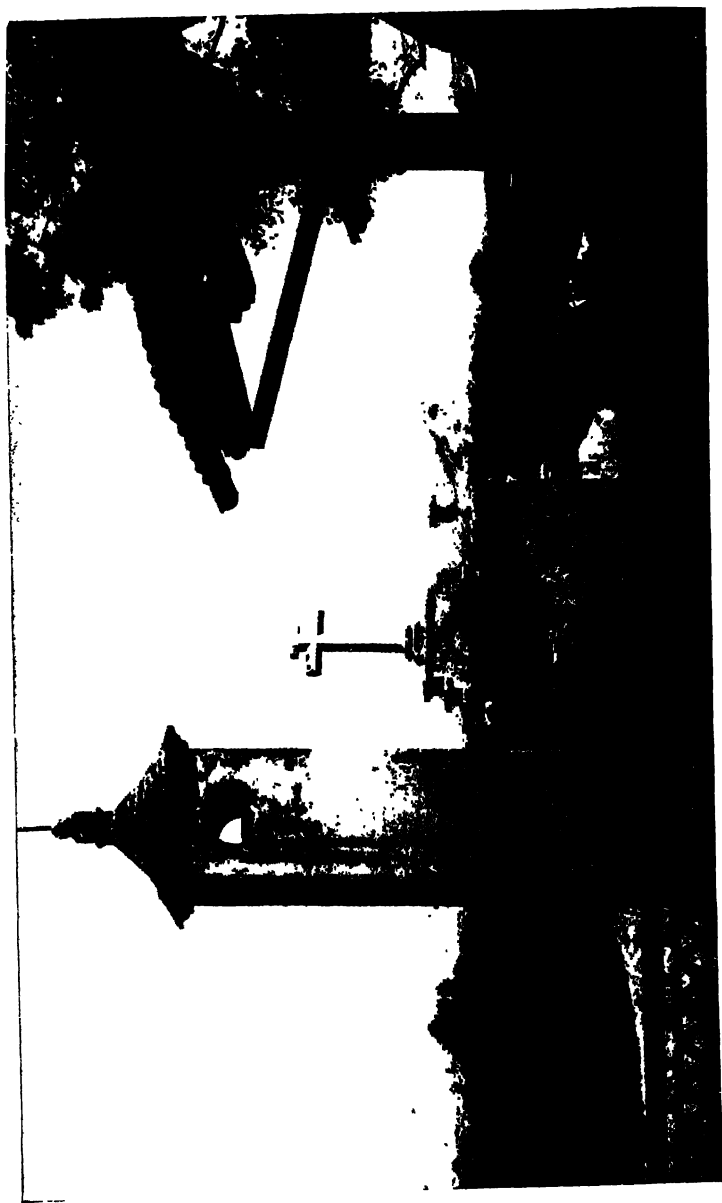
### *Travel Lines of Least Resistance*

#### A. THE WINGS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

Two means of traveling to and through Mexico will increasingly dominate public favor when we have forgotten the transient curbs imposed by priorities and rationing. These are, of course, the airplane and the automobile. The development of air travel will be continuous and spectacular. The use of the automobile, especially the traveler's own personal car, will be very widespread because the roads of Mexico are definitely good and growing better, and because motor travel offers a freedom and intimacy with towns and countryside which no other practical form of locomotion, except leisurely cycling, can match; and also—to be fair one must be brutal—because Mexican rail service and bus travel have been badly demoralized by shortages and by labor troubles and will not conceivably be attractive for several years to come.

Steamer travel, from New York and New Orleans to Vera Cruz, will undoubtedly have and deserve its numerous addicts, for the three- or five-day cruise each way is a tropical delight in itself. International trains, too, will have their following, and the service within Mexico—now undergoing a gradual but determined regeneration—will ultimately be good, with air-conditioned luxury expresses, originating in such key points as St. Louis, El Paso and Los Angeles, speed-





VIEW FROM SAN ANGEL INN, MEXICO CITY. THE SNOW COVERED MOUNTAINS ARE IXTACCIHUATL  
IN THE BACKGROUND (right)



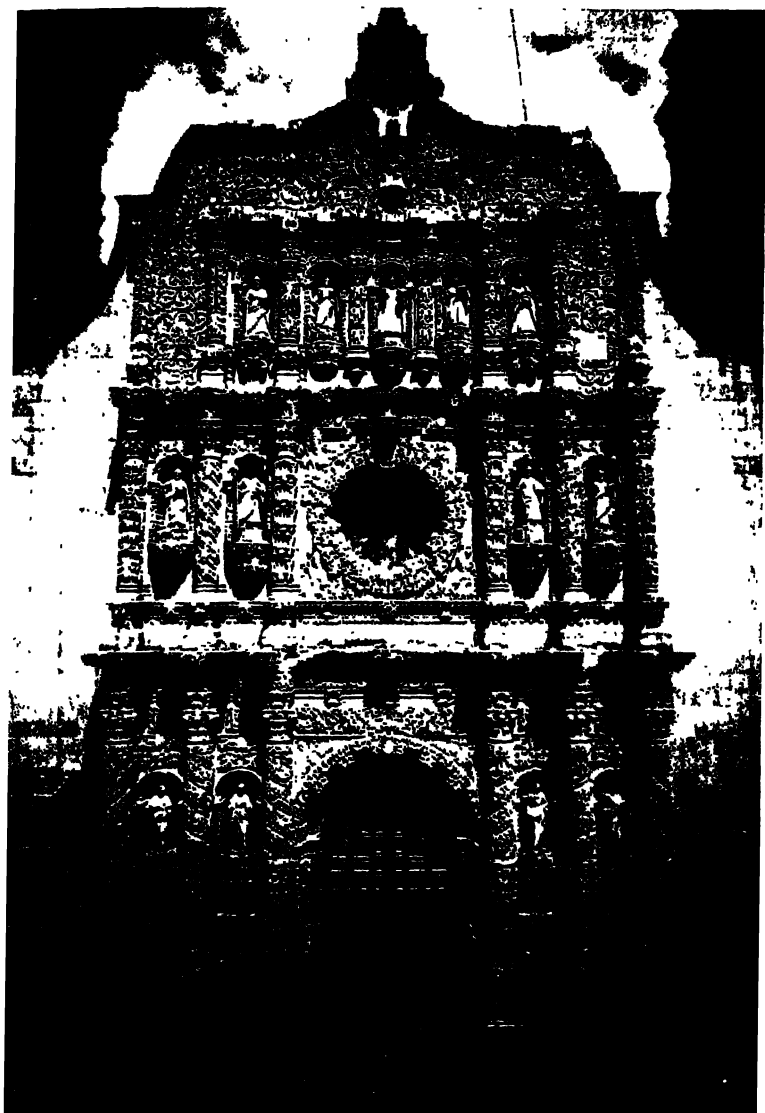
THE CELEBRATED AZTEC CALENDAR STONE, GREATEST SCIENTIFIC "DOCUMENT" LEFT BY ABORIGINAL AMERICA. THE INSCRIPTION STATES THAT IT WAS FOUND IN 1790 AT THE BASE OF THE WEST TOWER OF THE CATHEDRAL IN MEXICO CITY.



CARVING OF THE TOLTEC TEMPLE OF QUETZALCOATL AT TEOTIHUACAN NEAR MEXICO CITY. NOTE THE  
"PLUMED SERPENT," SYMBOL OF THE GOD.



IN A MOMENT A TON OF SAVAGE ANIMAL WILL CHARGE AND THE CROWD WILL YELL JOLÉ, JOLÉ, JOLÉ  
IN RHYTHM TO THE WEAVING OF THE TORERO'S SUPPLE BODY:



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

PORTAL OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ZACATECAS, TYPICAL OF THE DECORATIVE EXUBERANCE SEEN IN MANY OF MEXICO'S 1300 CHURCHES.



A COOL SANGRIA OR A TEQUILA COCKTAIL IS CALLED FOR ON THE PORCH OF THE HOTEL VIRREY DE MENDOZA IN MORELIA.



FOUNTAIN AND PLAZA, PALM TREES AND LOAFING, THESE ARE THE TRAVELER'S GUADALAJARA.



PARICUTIN, MEXICO'S PHENOMENAL VOLCANO WHICH BROKE THROUGH A MICHOACAN CORNFIELD ON FEBR. 20, 1943. IT IS THE ONLY NEW VOLCANO BORN IN THE WORLD IN THE LAST 150 YEARS.



ing to Mexico City and back. The plane and the private car, however, will hold unquestioned preeminence.

Plane service is developing at such a vertiginous rate that no published book can hope to keep up with its progress. New editions would be required almost monthly. But the main systems can be sorted and described. The international systems at this writing are four in number:

1. *Pan-American World Airways* is, of course, the doyen of the group, and as the United States pioneer in the international field, it was long the only system entering Mexico from the United States. Its clippers and strato-clippers have been familiar sights in the Mexican air for years. The "Main Line" of P.A.W.A. leads from Brownsville, Texas (via Tampico), to the Mexican capital, then southward through Guatemala City and all the other Central American capitals to Balboa in the Panama Canal Zone. Other P.A.W.A. services operate from Miami (via Havana) to Mérida, the capital of Yucatán (which is a province of Mexico, though the American public is hazy on this point), and from New Orleans to Mérida—and on to Guatemala. The take-off points from United States soil are tied to New York, Chicago and other cities east of the Mississippi by Eastern Air Lines. A subsidiary of P.A.W.A., the *Compañía Mexicana de Aviación*—called C.M.A. for short—operates passenger services of the same standard to Mexico City from Los Angeles via Mazatlán and Guadalajara; from Mérida via Vera Cruz; from Nuevo Laredo via Monterrey. As the good planes of today give way to the better planes of tomorrow, and those to still newer, larger and more sumptuous ones, we may look for flying hotels accommodating perhaps a hundred and fifty passengers and with every conceivable luxury and refinement except a tiled swimming pool and a tennis court. "But why except these?" queries someone. One has to fall back

on the jargon of the radio sports announcer putting a football game on the air with all the palpitating drama at his command. "Gee, folks! What a sight this is! What a day! What a game! *Anything* can happen!"

2. *American Airlines* was second on the scene. Its planes, of the same quality as those used in the States, make daily flights to Mexico City from Fort Worth and El Paso, by way of Monterrey. At the Texas points above mentioned connections by the same system are made with Chicago and the chief eastern cities, and with Los Angeles.

3. *United Air Lines* entered the Mexican picture by its purchase of the small Mexican system called LAMSA, meaning *Líneas Aereas Mexicanas, Sociedad Anónima*. Originally, the M stood for *Mineras*, indicating that LAMSA served the mining region north of Mazatlán. A branch was run from Mazatlán to Torreón in central Mexico and from that point the growing system extended south to the capital. This quickly became the main stem and grew northward as well as southward, reaching Chihuahua, whence it continued to Nogales (for Arizona) and Ciudad Juárez (for El Paso, Texas). United will undoubtedly make it the equal, in quality of international service, of the other great American systems.

4. *Braniff* won a concession in Mexico in 1944, and its announced plans of expansion include not only the trunk line from Texas to Mexico City but continuations to southern Mexico and to Vera Cruz and Mérida.

Competition is the life of air trade, as of any other, and we may expect to see, in due course, superlative service to Mexico from several directions and within Mexico to all key cities. We may also expect to see fares shrink to delightfully small figures. The Museum of Modern Art in New York gave throngs of excited visitors thrills of anticipation by dis-

playing a prophetic chart of future flying hours and flying fares from New York to many cities of the world, as of (by present hopes) the year 1948. This chart was reproduced, with enthusiasm, by the newspapers of Mexico. The *Horas de Vuelo* from New York to Mexico City were given as eight hours and twelve minutes; the *Viaje de Ida* (outward trip) was priced—prophetically—at \$61.50; the *Viaje Redondo* (round trip) at \$110.70.

Stop-overs in northern Mexico are seldom made by air travelers, but there is no good explanation for this except natural impatience to establish oneself in the great and glamorous capital. Monterrey, with its attractive neighbor Saltillo, invites a halt for C.M.A. and American Airlines passengers coming from Texas. (These cities do actually come in for a great deal of attention, though not from air travelers. They are on, and just off, the Pan-American Highway.) On the central air route from El Paso (United's LAMSA route) the cities of Chihuahua and San Luis Potosí cry for attention—and do not receive it. The former—the terminus of a paved road (227 miles) from Ciudad Juárez (El Paso)—enjoys some motor and bus traffic but it should also win air stop-over traffic. It is a silver city in a peculiar sense, for some of its stately old mansions and public edifices are said to have been constructed from the slag and dross of the fabulous Santa Eulalia silver mine near by. Primitive methods of reducing the ore in Spanish-colonial times threw out such rich waste that this material, still known to exist in old structures, actually tempts building wreckers today to tear down business buildings and private houses for the silver they contain. More practical attractions for the visitor are found in the group of appealing plazas, in the rich cathedral built from a silver tax, and in the Royal Chapel where Mexico's devoted liberator, Father Hidalgo, spent his last

hours. A special attraction is found also in the *perro pelón* (bald dog) which will be recognized as the "Mexican hairless." This curious animal is more properly called the Chihuahueno. Mention of Father Hidalgo's tragic end tempts me to a diversion from such practicalities as are demanded by this listing of air routes, but the priest-patriot's story fits better with the cities where he lived and strove than with the city where he was shot and crudely butchered.

Torreón, the prosperous junction city whence LAMSA's side line leaps over the sierra to the Pacific at Mazatlán, is that rare thing in Mexico, an uninteresting place. I, at least, found twenty-four hours there that many too much. But San Luis Potosí, next stop to the south, is an appealing silver city like Chihuahua. Its name was borrowed from the fabulous mining city of colonial Peru which now lies within Bolivia. The air route which centers Mexico like the central stalk of a leaf will win popularity as its powerful owner builds up its service.

The western air route of C.M.Á. from Los Angeles clings to the Pacific coast and makes one really exciting stop on its way to Guadalajara and Mexico City. I refer to that "little Rio" whose name is Mazatlán. There is nothing to see here except Mazatlán itself (unless yesterday's *rapido* pulling into the railway station a day late is of interest). The setting of this decaying port—for it has indeed lost much of its former importance—is marvelously beautiful, and Crestón Island, with one of the world's most loftily situated lighthouses, is a satisfactory Sugar Loaf, if one has not seen the greater one at Rio. Mazatlán's pre-Lenten carnival is likewise satisfactory to the point of brilliance if, again, one has not witnessed the greater carnival of the greater Rio. I like this lazy town of the Western Sea and would not wish to

pass through or over it without at least a night or two in the beachside Hotel Belmar, lulled by soporific surf.

#### B. THE POLY-AMERICAN HIGHWAY

The road which *almost* ties together all of the mainland Americas will not be strictly Pan-American until every gap has been closed, including the rather forbidding one in southern Mexico. Let us make a bow to the chilly goddess of truth and call the road Poly-American until undeniable facts replace the wishful words of propaganda and validate the word Pan. Meanwhile, the net effect for motorists to Mexico is unhampered by this deferment to conservatism. The line of least resistance for drivers of private cars is, of course, that 763-mile sub-tropical boulevard leading from the Laredo Bridge at the Texas border to Mexico City. (The boulevard, as mentioned in the Map Foreword, already continues southward clear to Oaxaca, and a rough road goes much farther toward Guatemala.) The main portion of the road to the capital is traversed in thirty hours by buses of the Transportes del Norte, a Mexican associate of Greyhound and can be "experienced"—which is perhaps an unfair word for this best-run of Mexican bus lines—for the modest fare of less than ten dollars one way.

A couple of practical pointers may creep in here. First, and by far foremost, motorists should contact by mail—well in advance—the automobile organization known as *Pemex*, whose information office (whatever old leaflets say) is at the following awkward address: 116 Calle Artículo 123, Mexico City. (Article 123 of the Mexican constitution is one which seeks to ameliorate conditions of labor. The name thus serves as a permanent reminder to the government.) *Pemex*, meaning *Petróleos Mexicanos*, is your informed and intimate

friend of highway travel. It has its obvious commercial motive, since it sells you gas and lubricates your car at any of its numerous modern service stations throughout Mexico, but it is also a propaganda organization of unusual energy. It provides essential information about paved highways, all-weather roads and adventure roads throughout the republic and upon request it will map out your whole tour. It offers a wide variety of free booklets (note especially the useful *Motoring in Mexico*) and up-to-date maps. Membership in Pemex Travel Club, a non-profit service organization, is free to foreign motorists, as are all of its informational services. These include, besides the above, impartial advice on hotels and lodging in all parts of Mexico; on facilities for study and research; on shopping, customs formalities, hunting, fishing, sports, special fiestas—in short, on everything that makes up Mexico. Information can be secured through the Mexican government's tourist office at 630 Fifth Avenue, New York City, but a direct letter to the Mexico City office of Pemex, sent well ahead of your visit, will be much more effective.

My appreciation of this pervasive organization of Mexican motoring is so frank that I shall be accused of being its puppet publicist, but the truth is that I am no more known to Pemex than is any casual American traveler. I stress the services of the organization solely by way of presenting a friend in court to the first-time motorist. The second-time motorist already knows all about Pemex—except possibly its central Information Office (with the awkward address), which is peculiarly hard to find, though it lies right back of the great red building of *Petróleos Mexicanos*, a conspicuous ornament on Avenida Juárez in the capital.

My second practical pointer for highway travelers is *Power's Guide*, published by the Pan-American Tourist Bu-

reau at Laredo, Texas. This used to be brought out annually, but it lapsed for a time and now it may be hard to secure. The American Bookstore at 25 Avenida Madero, Mexico City, should still have it and should gladly send it for fifty cents and perhaps a dime for international postage. *Power's Guide*, though covering all of Mexico, is pleasantly fanatical in its enthusiastic treatment of the highway. It offers border information, a highway log, plant life of the highway, hotel information, and an amazing galaxy of picturized maps and town plans for every portion of the great artery. If the book has a perceptible odor of advertising—and it does—the advertisements are at least interesting since they picture in exciting photographic detail the hotels where you are most likely to stay. The *Gran Hotel Ancira*, chief hostelry of Monterrey, is shown with a foreground of plaza and palms against the magnificent backdrop of the Sierra Madre Mountains. The *Hotel Sierra Gorda* of Victoria is shown through a vista of shrubs. And so, in turn, appear the *Hotel Mante* in Mante, the *Casa Grande* in Valles, and several others in other towns of the road. But Power's Café & Curio Shop at Sabinas Hidalgo is lustily trumpeted as "the only stop worth your while between Laredo and Monterrey," whereas the thoroughly delightful *Hotel Arizpe* of Saltillo (on a branch road west of Monterrey), though shown on one of the maps, rates no mention at all in text or advertisements. Despite such gaps of information, this little guide is worth securing at the cost of some trouble. It is written and extensively mapped for the motorist.

Monterrey and its region constitute, for average travelers, the only important center on the highway. Other towns are convenient as breaks in the long trip, and the last 200-mile stretch, from Tamazunchale to the capital, halts the motor-

ist at almost every curve for it offers scenery of a brilliance hardly matched elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, including the Andes range with its far loftier roads, but Monterrey is large and rewards the visitor for a stay of one or two days.

The city is aided in a business way and lessened in picturesqueness by its proximity (146 miles) to Texas. Its climate is far less placid and dependable, especially in winter, than is that of the central plateau farther south; but it presents Mexico attractively, with lovely plazas for siesta, with the Chepe Vera hill, appropriately crowned by a ruined ecclesiastical palace (*El Obispado*), and with rugged scenic surroundings. It presents, too, a branch of Sanborn's. Nothing is more Mexican, from the visitor's standpoint, than the institution known as Sanborn's. In the capital it literally brings to a focus the social and business life of the nation. In Monterrey its pleasant branch focuses local tourist life, both American and Mexican, and lures all transients to its cheerful little patio. Sanborn's will be discussed—for it is truly important in any picture of Mexico—in a later chapter on the capital, but it should be underlined here as one of the main attractions of Monterrey. Its Mexican wares—from silver to sarapes—are interesting even to non-shoppers. Its restaurant, around an inner patio, provides an appealing rendezvous. The waitresses, as in the capital establishment, wear Mexican costumes, consisting of a voluminous many-colored skirt, a gay bodice, a yard-wide winged attachment on the shoulders in almost any color that is not harsh, and a broad ribbon-like headdress that falls far down at the back. The costume is that formerly worn in a village on Lake Pátzcuaro.

It is not quite decent to mention Monterrey without offering a tribute to its famous Cuauhtémoc Brewery, largest



in Mexico, which is a sight of the city. Public tours are made through it at almost hourly intervals and the tourist is rewarded at the end by free beer in the garden. It will be the brand called *Carta Blanca* (White Letter), than which no name in Mexican business or pleasure is better known. *Carta Blanca* gleams and flashes in Neon lights from strategic points in all the towns of the republic, and one becomes so weary of it that one is almost reluctant to concede the truth—that the beer *is* good. Even one who has spent many years in Europe and a few minutes in Milwaukee can make that honest statement.

The side trip to Saltillo is almost a must for motorists who find themselves in Monterrey. The distance is but fifty-three miles over a paved road as good as the highway. The scenery is magnificent; and the weather will probably be bright and cheerful even if in the larger city it is overcast and misty. Saltillo calls itself the Denver of Mexico, chiefly because it is ambitious and because it lies—like Denver—just a mile above sea level. If you elect to go by bus—and there is frequent service from Monterrey—you will find the going labeled first-class and the quality definitely endurable. This is, in fact, one of the (relatively) good bus services in Mexico. You will be deposited in Saltillo on a street surprisingly named Calle Theodore S. Abbott in the shopping center.

Saltillo is a city of sunshine and sarapes and the alliteration is not a mere Chamber of Commerce slogan. The sunshine is almost continuous the year around and is doubly delightful in the city's bracing altitude. The sarapes used to be internationally famous but have deteriorated in quality, though not in brilliance of color. These gay and sometimes lurid blankets—the better ones being of wool—are worn as shawls by humble folk, chiefly Indians, throughout Mexico. The sarape is primarily a male garment (its counterpart for

women being the less bulky *rebozo*) and is worn in smart or sloppy fashion, according to the character of its owner. The sarape market, bordering the main street as you come into Saltillo, is a shoppers' rainbow and no woman tourist has ever been known to pass it without entering. You will be accosted also by many a sarape-monger on many a street corner. Most of them appear to be named Jesús and all of them have better sarapes than any of their competitors.

The civic and cathedral complex in the eastern part of the city, and the superlative double park (Parque Zaragoza and Parque Porfirio Díaz) in the western part, add great distinction. The double park is among the loveliest bosky retreats to be found anywhere, even in this land of Mexico, which makes almost a religion of its parks and plazas. Midway between civic center and parks, at 122 Calle Victoria, lies the hotel named *Arizpe* for its *fundador*, Don Miguel Arizpe y Ramón, and the charm of this place, visited perhaps for lunch, insures the success of your Saltillo day.

For some four hundred miles due south of Monterrey the highway is merely pleasant and perhaps a bit torrid. It cuts through luscious orange orchards by the score and at all the towns and wayside halts huge oranges are purchasable for five or ten centavos apiece—which is one or two American pennies. At the little resort town of Tamazunchale—universally called "Thomas and Charlie" by Americans—the road quite suddenly becomes aware that it has a very stiff climb ahead of it, to mount from an altitude of 500 feet to 7,500 feet. With enormous gusto it tackles the job and the next two hundred miles, as I have said with emphasis but not exaggeration, constitute one of the outstanding travel wonders of this hemisphere. Traverse it by sunlight or by full-moonlight (as I first did) and you will readily concede that

there is no road scenery in Switzerland, or Norway, or Austria's Vorarlberg, or Germany's Bavaria, that can surpass it in spectacular artistry. You may prefer more snow, more lakes, and more waterfalls, as seen in Europe, but the changing color effects of this Mexican marvel act to offset that lack. At every turn, and there are hundreds, one color picture dissolves into another. The mountain peaks are in parade formation and the more distant ranks are clad in ever paler colors as they march over the horizon. In moonlight, these pictures are so other-worldly that they reduce the most garrulous gusher of the tourist tribe to inarticulate awe. They are a musician's dream of a moonlight sonata. Through towns and hamlets with strange Indian names they lead you on and up to the broad harmonies of the central plateau, whose nucleus is the Valley of Mexico, centered by the capital.

If you make this trip by night—with the moon as a silvery lantern—you will enter the vast spreading capital at crisp dawn. Sleepy sentinels at the city limits will look at you, will jot down the registration number of your car for the traffic census, and will wave you on with never a word. You have entered Mexico, D. F.—which is to say *Distrito Federal*.

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## CHAPTER III

### *Money in Mexico*

#### A. PREVIEW OF PRICES

THE most absorbing topic in the world of travel is money. It must be so from the frequency with which it is discussed by tourists and it is so almost by axiom. What do I get in exchange for my dollar? How much can I buy with what I get? What should I pay for lodging and meals and various incidentals? And what about tips? These are the questions that simmer in the cauldron of travel and come to the seething point in those who, by nature or necessity, are addicted to thrift.

Unfortunately, the mathematics of money, as used in a foreign land, cannot be viewed as a fixed matter and truthful reports given today may be false tomorrow. This caution is particularly necessary in the case of Mexico, where, despite efforts by the government, inflation of a fairly virulent sort has raised havoc with prices since 1941. Returning travelers do Mexico a disservice when they exclaim orally and in print, that "you can live like a prince down there for the money you'd spend on bare necessities in the States." Even as this book goes to press I read occasional enthusiastic burblings in the "Letters to the Editor" sections of important United States newspapers about the amazing cheapness of everything in Mexico. These reports simply are not true. They are based on the crudest impressionism, perhaps on

nothing more substantial than shoe shines and trolley fares, which are four cents and two cents, respectively, in most cities. *Some things* are cheap. Some are ridiculously dear. Some, including basic living costs for dollar transients, are not much different from those in the States. The facts may be neatly sorted into three categories and the sorting is substantially fair.

1. Anything which is based primarily on human labor is cheap in Mexico, except where the blind lavishness of tourist spending has vitiated the natural integrity of the people. Servants—and good ones at that—may be had for one-sixth, or even one-eighth, of their “market value” in the United States and by the same token railway, bus and trolley fares (as well as haircuts, beauty parlor treatments, shines and all personal services) are, and will doubtless remain, far under the levels to which we are accustomed, since these costs depend to a large extent on the element of labor.

2. Prices of manufactured goods, except hand-wrought specialties of artists and craftsmen, are painfully high because most of these goods are imported from the United States or can be “moved” from the shelves at prices commensurate with imported goods. If you have to buy a shirt or shoes or a hat or an overcoat in Mexico, be prepared to pay at least fifty percent more than you would pay for the same merchandise at home. One wonders how the white-collar worker of Mexico manages to live at all for he is wickedly squeezed between the millstones of low salary and the high cost of apparel, to mention only one item.

3. Hotel and restaurant prices have risen enormously since 1941 but are still reasonable (though not cheap) by our standards. Mounting real estate values and mounting taxes have lifted hotel rates in the capital and in the chief resorts. Food shortages, together with general inflation, have

lifted restaurant prices. *Hotel Reforma*, leader of luxury in Mexico City, lists its single rooms currently at four to six dollars, its double rooms at ten to twelve. This is by no means alarming, nor is it thrillingly cheap. The Reforma's restaurant meals (served by *Ciro's*) are widely advertised at \$1.50 for luncheon, \$2.50 for dinner. In the first-class independent restaurants downtown (and Americans rarely experiment with second-class places) one may buy a steak for sixty cents (meat is inexpensive) but a meal of ordinary proportions, without wine or beer, will certainly come to a dollar or more. Again, this is neither alarming nor thriftily exciting. In the provinces, excepting a few popular and overcrowded resorts, prices of both lodging and meals are far lower. In fact, the small unpublicized cities still offer cheap living, and sometimes great travel rewards as well, to those who enjoy venturing away from the beaten track. Three or four dollars is likely to be enough for a night's lodging and a full day's meals in the best hotel—and by no means bad—in these towns of unsung Mexico.

The exchange rate, up to the moment of this writing, has been sturdily held by the government at approximately five Mexican pesos to the dollar. It has been 4.80 for traveler's checks in most hotels, a trifle better in banks and travel offices. Dark rumors of a three-to-one rate—which would be a body blow to *turismo* but not a knockout—have long been rife, but they have not yet been translated into hard fact. Such a rate would make the going very high for American dollar travelers and would seriously impair one of Mexico's major sources of revenue. The government, whatever the pressure upon it, will ponder well before actually making so drastic a move.

## B. THE DESIGNER'S MESSAGE

The Mexican money you receive for your dollars is worth a bit of initial study for two reasons. First, familiarity will enable you to avoid from the outset the mistakes and the confused fumbblings which characterize the performance of some tourists for days or even for their entire stay. Second, the money has informative value and romantic interest.

Money now *folds* from one peso, worth about twenty cents, to a thousand pesos, worth two hundred dollars. The big silver clinker which was the peso until 1942 has virtually disappeared from circulation, though one may still encounter it in a few provincial cities. The messages on the more familiar bills, the one, five, ten and twenty, are decidedly worth attention for they present interesting vignettes of the Mexican scene and important hints on history.

The *one-peso note* shows, on one side, the Aztec calendar stone, perhaps the most famous work of science left anywhere by primitive America, and on the other, Mexico's tall Independence Monument, at whose base glows the eternal flame to the Unknown Soldier. These are among the chief sights of the country and are seen and admired by all visitors. The calendar stone is the central showpiece of the National Museum and the Independence Monument rises 150 feet in marble and granite from the fourth glorieta of the capital's famous Paseo de la Reforma, not far from Chapultepec park and castle.

The *five-peso note* presents a Mexican beauty with a flower in her hair and a long silver chain looping over her bosom. The silver chain will light fires in the shopper's eye. On the reverse of this note is the Independence Monument, as on the one.

The *ten-peso note* presents one of the loveliest of Mexico's "types," a girl with head and face framed in a vast white ruff hardly matched by Queen Elizabeth or by any of the coifs of Holland. You may chance to see a girl like this in Oaxaca on a day of fiesta but you are sure to see one if you make your arduous way to Tehuantepec at the narrowest point of Mexico's isthmus in the south. The Tehuanas are said to outnumber the Tehuanos (their racial menfolk) almost five to one, the men having been killed off in civil wars. At any rate, the women are a handsome, vigorous and brilliantly colorful breed. As a separate ethnic stock they are apparently due for extinction like the heath hens of Martha's Vineyard. Or will the few remaining pure-blooded Tehuanos accept the challenge and save the race?

On the opposite side of the ten-peso note is a *Panorámica de Guanajuato*; in other words, a hill's-eye view of one of the most striking and historic small cities in Mexico. Perhaps the picture will spur you to make your way to this treasury of romance. In so doing you will be one of very few, for Guanajuato has been inexplicably neglected by travelers. If you go there before the inevitable surge begins to roll in that direction you will enjoy the place almost as a personal discovery.

The *twenty-peso note* pictures the patio of the delightful government palace in Querétaro (cradle of the Independence movement) on one side; on the other, a stern-visaged woman called *La Corregidora*. You will run across this woman frequently in Mexico for despite her dour appearance, as of a cross between Queen Victoria and a militant temperance reformer, she was a great patriot, and symbolizes the country's unquenchable determination to achieve liberty. *Corregidor* means mayor (or local governor) and *La Corregidora* was the wife of the governor of Querétaro. It



was she who helped hatch the earliest plot for liberty and dramatically warned the patriot leaders when the plot was discovered by the Spanish oppressors. Look for La Corregidora in bronze in Mexico City's Plazuela de Santo Domingo, and look for her—much more pointedly—in Querétaro, the city of her devoted activity. If the ten- and twenty-peso notes lure you, respectively, to Guanajuato and Querétaro they will have done a job quite as valid as paying for your overhead while there.

The subsidiary coinage of Mexico is now simple to handle and to understand since the clumsy silver peso and the confusing little silver piece of twenty centavos have been eliminated. The list of them is brief: the fifty-centavo coin in silver; the big twenty in copper, like a British penny but worth twice as much; the ten and the five in nickel; and the five also in bulkier copper. The chief ornaments are the cap of liberty, the cactus, the Toltec pyramids and, of course, the conspicuous Mexican symbol, an eagle standing on a cactus and devouring a snake. La Corregidora is present, too, on the obverse of the copper sou.

A curiosity of Mexican money and transactions is that the peons in all parts of the country prefer money which they can ring rather than fold. It does not seem like money to them unless it makes a clatter when dropped. The result is that in many of the provinces hard money is hoarded, despite anything that the government can do, and change is consequently scarce. Often this causes an embarrassing impasse. In small transactions neither purchaser nor seller admits to having any change at all. How shall the deal be consummated? More than once I have been forced to submit to the most direct and crude solution imaginable. I have offered a paper peso for a fifty-centavo purchase and the tradesman or vendor has promptly torn the note in two and given

me one half as change. It is not easy for one who accepts this solution to work off the remaining half but it can be done by those capable of using a strong and masterful manner in a foreign country.

### C. TIPS WITHOUT WORRY

The question of tips is a perplexing one discussed in confidential tone by all tourists. Mexico does not help out by adopting the European custom of adding a fixed ten percent service charge on hotel and restaurant bills and letting it go at that. Ten percent is, however, a fairly safe and convenient rule and the adoption of it will eliminate worry. Many Americans are far more lavish than this, and sometimes ridiculously so, to the sharp annoyance of Mexicans, who cannot compete with such largess. If the extravagant tip givers would curb their natural tendencies by recalling the ten percent rule, and if devotedly thrifty persons would temper the application of the rule by a bit of "immoral generosity," the net result all around should be fairly satisfactory. And if every traveler would manage to have on hand at all times an ample supply of paper one-peso notes and silver half-pesos, the worst worry of all—lack of change—would be demolished at the outset. This plan is not very easy to put into practice in a "changeless" country like Mexico, but for that very reason it is important to attempt it. The recipient of your favors will hardly ever admit having change and to avoid embarrassment you will give far too much. But whenever you make a *purchase* of anything, including a meal, you are entitled to present a note larger than one which will barely cover the amount. You may then insist upon change.

Porters—but that subject has never been solved by any rule. Tariffs often exist and are often flouted both by givers

and demanders of tips, for porters are spoiled by tourists as quickly as fruit by a hot sun. A peso per bag at railway stations and the like should certainly be very ample if not lavish. And if a porter demands, in his brand of English, "Fifty cents a bag, sir," or "Sixty cents a bag, lady," do not fly into a rage. Assume that he is being moderate and that he means fifty or sixty *centavos*. Porters, especially at frontiers, love to befuddle travelers by using the word cents instead of centavos. They hope that in your haste to get along with the business in hand you will be sufficiently rattled to pay actually five times what the official tariff authorizes. If challenged they can always point to the tariff and blandly assure you that they asked only fifty (or sixty) centavos. But the subject of porter peculations need not intrude further. It can be comfortably and truthfully said in general that (porters possibly aside) those who serve you in Mexico are honest by nature. The tendency to "gyp" is merely a tourist incrustation in a few places and has not reached grim proportions. It is by no means second nature, as in some parts of Europe.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Tremendous Trivia*

#### A. ADVISERS IN ADVANCE

*Mexico, Vade-mecum for the Visitor*, published by the Mexican Tourist Association, in conjunction with the government, and obtainable at 630 Fifth Avenue, New York City (and many agencies in other cities), is the simplest of all advisers on the details of two-way travel and transient life below the Rio Grande. It is distributed gratis, along with other more general and glamorous brochures. Its clearly arranged items of counsel may be checked for up-to-dateness at the bureau which distributes it, since details change with some frequency.

The 700-page annual called *The South American Handbook*, available at any bookstore for the astonishingly modest sum of one dollar, by no means limits itself to South America. It covers every nook and cranny of Latin America and devotes thirty-two pages to Mexico. It covers every conceivable topic and its editors strive to keep it up to the date of the current year stamped on its cover.

*Pemex* and *Power* are discussed in Chapter 2 as valuable advisers to the motorist.

Several lavish brochures with current travel information are also put out by the transportation companies, especially by the international air systems. That entitled *Make Friends with Mexico*, offered by American Airlines, is one of the

most sumptuous of them and includes a "Mexican Miscellany" with ably condensed information on travel practicalities.

The *Pan-American Union* is a wellspring of travel information. It is, of course, an official bureau of Good Neighborliness and exists primarily to foster friendship and unity in the Western Hemisphere. It has informative literature of every sort and will cheerfully send you, for next to nothing, folders and other helpful material on Mexico. Merely address the Travel Division, Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C.

Some forthright comment on guide-books may be briefly made. *Terry's Guide* is the Baedeker of the group, with 900 pages of closely packed detail, but even its "latest revised and augmented edition" is far from up-to-date on matters of hotels, transportation and current costs. These things simply change too fast for Mr. Terry. In fact, it is to be doubted if an adequate Baedeker could be published on today's Mexico. If you use the book for its historical, artistic, gastronomical and general comment and for its numerous city maps, you will be duly rewarded. The detail on cultural subjects and on customs of life is encyclopedic in scope and the author's affection for the country's great monuments of art and architecture wins the reader's sincere respect. The text is occasionally garnished with flights of floral prose from which—and there is no other phrase for it—you will get a prodigious kick; as, for instance, this typical passage about moonlight bathing in Acapulco: "Luna sheds a witching radiance over the dusky scene and pencils elfin shadows on the sands and in the silvery surge, as the muted bathers move to and fro." The late Karl Baedeker's translation of this sentence would read: "Playa Caleta, 1½ m. from town, popular bath-

ing beach by moonlight as well as daylight; cabins and other facilities lacking."

Anita Brenner's *Your Mexican Holiday* I have found an attractive and useful volume; partly because of its very lively style which leads one on and permits no yawning; partly because of its ingenious General Directory (100 pages); and chiefly because Miss Brenner's long experience in Mexico makes her comment in general authoritative.

*Latin-American Republics*, edited by Earl Parker Hanson and sponsored by the Office of the U. S. Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, presents Mexico in a fresh, stimulating way in 160 pages at the beginning of Volume One. This book is something of a return on personal investment since your federal income tax and mine helped to pay for it. The project could not possibly have been put through as a business enterprise that had to support itself—especially in the world of 1943, when it was published.

Frances Toor's *Guide to Mexico*, revised rather faithfully at not too long intervals, has special value for the motorist; and her little *Interpretative Guides* to the Mexican murals, purchasable in separate pamphlets in the bookstores of Mexico City, are standard works on this absorbing subject.

#### B. BORDER BARRIERS LOWERED

Scare stories about border formalities are a nickel a dozen on both sides of the Mexico-United States line but actually the barriers are as low as any I have ever encountered at any frontier in the world, including the Canada-United States line. This is true, at any rate, for holders of tourist cards, which are valid for six months and which may be promptly secured at any Mexican consulate by American-born Americans at a cost of one dollar each. Naturalized Americans will

need a lot more time and patience to secure the necessary papers. Those who have the magic tourist card, a great demolisher of red tape, will need no passport or visa.

Money—which is to say cash—is only to be taken in or out of Mexico in the form of two-dollar bills but “change artists” flourish at all the border towns and will readily break down larger bills into twos. The reason for this odd but now familiar restriction lies in a close international cooperation to stamp out counterfeiting, for twos seem so far not to have been manufactured on the hidden presses. Of course, most travelers take their funds in the familiar travelers’ checks cashable anywhere in the currency of the country.

Photographs, undeveloped film, and written matter of all sorts may be held up for inspection in times when censorship is in force. Inquiry at any Mexican consulate will elicit the current facts on that topic, which is far less thorny and exasperating than is commonly supposed.

Customs inspection is wonderfully innocuous in the case of those who enter Mexico with tourist cards. The country wants you, welcomes you, and goes out of its way to make your entrance easy. Leaving Mexico has also been extremely simple in my own experience but it is advisable to inquire about the current rules for perfumes and also about taking home *silver articles*. Late in 1943 a tax of eighty pesos per kilo on the export of silver articles was imposed by the Mexican government but almost all of this (78 pesos) was remitted for those with tourist cards if the silver articles were bought from member shops of the National Silver Manufacturers’ Association (U.N.I.P. in Spanish) and if export certificates were secured from the merchant at the time of the purchase. The Information Desk at Sanborn’s in Mexico City is actually in the silverware annex of this store and that is the natural place for transients to secure the latest

information on taking home their silver "loot." I have found the Mexican customs guards extremely eager to cooperate in making the exit easy. No doubt they have been instructed by their government to "leave a good impression" on departing travelers so that they will come again. Nearly a quarter of a million Americans now visit the country annually and they leave in Mexico about sixty millions of good dollars.

### C. ALTITUDE GREMLINS

The altitude of Mexico City is officially stated to be 7434 feet. For purposes of comparison one may record that the figure for Mount Washington's summit is 6293 feet and that the Austrian village of Ober-Gurgl, loftiest community in Europe, is just over 6300 feet above sea level. To Mexico City the net result of its lofty situation on the nineteenth parallel of latitude is a wonderfully exhilarating climate. Says the *South American Handbook*, "The range of temperature is 35°-75° F. with 65° as mean; the nights are always cool." Those words are eloquent. Haiti is on the same latitude as this city. Dakar, across the Atlantic, is only a little south of it. But the climate of those localities reminds one of a steam *sauna*.

Altitude is a topic of consuming interest in Mexico, D. F. I suppose the net wordage spoken locally on this subject by tourists almost equals that spoken about money and surpasses that spoken about weather. A city 7500 feet above sea level seems to most Americans fantastically high, but to Colombians, Ecuadoreans, Peruvians and Bolivians it seems at a moderate or rather low level. I am hardly fitted to worry about it vocally or in print since I became familiar with Andean altitudes before ever seeing Mexico. Tourists concern themselves too much with the subject, I believe. Often



they expect to collapse if they run a few yards or dance too strenuously. They expect to be exhausted every evening. They expect to feel their hearts pound and their ears pop if some motor trip takes them from Mexico Valley up over a 10,000-foot pass. A favorite diversion of practical jokers is to tell tourists, when motoring, that the car is at some prodigious altitude and then "watch them suffer," when actually it is rolling along the valley floor; or, more mercifully, to tell them they are still on the valley floor (and watch their expressions of relief) when actually the car is three thousand feet above it. The average person with sound heart simply does not notice the altitude of Mexico City unless he or she is reminded of it. I had, in fact, to be reminded of it by a curious fact of sport. A college classmate of mine was coach of the University of Mexico football team and he expressed his belief that a punt will carry fifteen yards farther in the rarefied air of Mexico, D. F., a mile and a half above sea level, than it will in the air of playing fields in our American seaboard cities. Drop kicks and field goals may be sensibly attempted from points five or ten yards farther from the goal than would be warranted on fields of the United States seaboard.

The Mexico which most transient travelers see is the lofty table-land in the center of the country, the chief exceptions being Acapulco and perhaps the highway from Laredo, or possibly the ports of Vera Cruz and Mazatlán. Toluca (8700 feet) is the highest city in this central sector and Cuernavaca (4500 feet) is among the lowest. Others may be mentioned as follows: Guadalajara 5200; Morelia 6200; Guanajuato 6500; Puebla 7100; Taxco 5600; Querétaro 5900; Oaxaca 5000. Those who are seriously concerned about altitude will prefer to spend most of their time at places in the brackets below 6000. The pass leading to Cuernavaca (and Taxco)

touches a mark close to 10,000 feet and that leading to Puebla is the highest road in Mexico, with its summit over 10,000 feet, but these high spots are quickly left behind. The resort of Fortín de las Flores is one of the few much-visited places in Mexico which lies actually at about the 3000-foot level and for this reason, among others, it is favored by those who dread to remain "up aloft."

#### D. GUIDES, PHILOSOPHERS AND FRIENDS

A tourist agency guide or one furnished by one of the leading hotels comes near to being a necessity in Mexico—especially in the provinces—a thing which has never been true of the more traveled portions of Europe. It is much less of a necessity if you speak Spanish but whatever your language equipment it can prove a most comforting buffer. Tourist agencies with central offices in Mexico City are numerous but I shall mention only two or three whose services are personally known to me.

*Wagons-Lits-Cook*, the world-wide "Cook," has an excellent branch in Mexico City, at 88 Avenida Juárez, which is the main business thoroughfare. Cook's office is nearly opposite the Regis Hotel, a bit west of the Alameda and is, therefore, conspicuous. Another great international organization is Wells Fargo, at 14 Avenida Madero, which is a continuation of the same central thoroughfare called Avenida Juárez in its western portion. This bureau is a step from Sanborn's, a step from the Ritz Hotel and directly across the street from the office of Pan-American World Airways.

*Aguirre's Guest Tours*, with office (on an upper floor) at 27 Avenida Cinco de Mayo, is smaller, equally efficient, more personal, like specialists in any field, in service rendered. This agency, concerning itself solely with Mexico travel, is

thoroughly informed and infectiously enthusiastic. Do not let its less conspicuous location bother you. Fifth-of-May Avenue is parallel to Avenida Madero and is almost equally important. Enter the modern office building at Number 27 and merely say to the elevator man "Aguirre." The *gu* is pronounced as in guitar.

I have taken half a dozen of Aguirre's one-day and two-day tours from the metropolis and also the longer Volcano tour—to which it devotes four days instead of three as offered by most agencies—and have been impressed with the quality of the guides, all of whom are Mexicans speaking good English. So natural and spontaneous was their information and chatter that I came honestly to value two or three of them as friends. I asked a thousand questions. I challenged them, argued with them, kidded them and was kidded in return. One was rosily optimistic about Mexico's future, another gloomy on the same subject. One was a very devout Roman Catholic, ready to defend his faith at the drop of a hat; another was an atheist and proud of it; still another was a young woman about town, smart as a trap but less dangerous; and a fourth, a Methodist lady with a Ph.D. for special research in history and archeology, was the most widely erudite guide I have ever encountered anywhere. They were a cross section of young Mexico and I found them quite as interesting as their tours. I had to remind myself that they were professional guides for there was nothing of the recitation or "spiel" about their guiding.

My point in emphasizing the service of tourist agencies may warrant repetition. I think Mexico City, and especially its surroundings and the provinces of which it is the natural hub, imperatively call for such service unless you have plenty of time and at least a fair colloquial knowledge of the Spanish language. For a dozen years I knocked about

Europe practically unaided by any such service, but Mexico is different. Europe has been accustomed to swarms of tourists, British and then American, for the past hundred years and more. Mexico is just coming into her own. She is progressing at a great clip but one still needs practical aid, good counsel and good cars, and timely tips in advance and all along the way.

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## THE BACKGROUND OF THE PICTURE

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## CHAPTER V

### *'A Pageant in Four Parts*

#### A. ABORIGINAL MARVELS OF MEXICO

Two mainland countries of Latin-America have a past so dramatic and exciting that they make all the others seem a bit pale. These are, of course, Peru and Mexico, the two upon which the scholarship of William H. Prescott seized with such sure grasp in his classics of history, *The Conquest of Peru* and *The Conquest of Mexico*. Both countries boasted wealthy empires and both had elaborate forms of aboriginal civilization. This made the conquest of them thrilling to the adventurous and greedy Spaniards; and the stories of those twin conquests, entirely aside from the style of any historian in recounting them, remain two of the most exciting scenes in the whole drama of history. Peru tapered off in dramatic value after Pizarro conquered the Incas, but Mexico, after Cortés conquered the Aztecs, has continued to produce one peak of interest after another, even to the present day. Whatever else is said of this country, it can never be accused of being dull.

An informal bibliography of the briefest possible compass, designed for the brusher-up on Mexico, may usefully intrude here. A good and interesting general history, for instance, is Henry Bamford Parkes' *A History of Mexico*. The first twenty pages tell, with extreme but intelligent condensation, the entire pre-conquest story. It is boiled prose

yet it retains its freshness and flavor. These seven thousand words can be not only read but studied in one hour. (In the book's remaining 400 pages the pace of the story is more deliberate.) Various scholarly tomes tell the story of Mexico's aboriginal marvels in much detail, but I know of no book covering this entire period which combines popular readability with scholarship in the same happy proportions that Philip Ainsworth Means has achieved in his books on the Inca civilization of Peru. To me, personally, this seems a real "lacuna" of literature.

For the period of the conquest there is the famous contemporary chronicle written by Cortés' companion, Bernal Díaz del Castillo. It is called *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* and the priceless original manuscript is in the municipal archives of Guatemala City; but, of course, it has been translated many times and it makes vivid reading in any translation. Prescott's *The Conquest of Mexico*, using the chronicle as only one contemporary report, is too well known to need further comment. Despite its length it is a book which one can hardly lay aside after starting to read or even re-read it.

For the Mexico that made its painful way from the first stirrings of Independence to the present era of freedom no adequate review is briefer, fairer, or more to the point than Hubert Herring's *Mexico, the Making of a Nation*, published by the Foreign Policy Association and sold, in paper covers, for a quarter. This is one of the so-called Headline Books and is no larger in size than a pamphlet. It is partly for that reason that it is so recommendable to the traveler in today's hurrying world. The author has condensed the whole story of Mexico's struggle for Independence and then for social freedom into less than a hundred pages and yet has kept



these pages—like their subject matter—unflaggingly interesting.

For today's Mexico, the nation that has taken shape since the Revolution (of 1910), the most obvious and electrically interesting quick review is Anita Brenner's *The Wind That Swept Mexico*. Miss Brenner's book deals solely with the years since 1910-1911, when the long-pent-up winds of popular aspiration grew into a gale and swept away the aging dictator, Porfirio Díaz, and his whole coterie of profiteers. It is wonderfully documented with 184 photographs assembled by George B. Leighton and there have been few books in the whole history of publication so richly appealing to the eye as is this one. The photographs, excitingly captioned, cover the whole thrilling range of the story. Tense drama, passion and pathos, snobbishness, misery, hope, struggle, despair, hope again—the pace of the tale never falters. I frankly urge the intending visitor to Mexico to hunt up this book. The message of the photographs will engrave on the mind a picture of modern Mexico that will outlast any words of any text.

Parkes points out the fact that Mexico is the principal spot where the ethnological currents of the world, originating in Asia, met and mingled. One current moved eastward, presumably by way of the Bering Strait and the Aleutians and ultimately inhabited all parts of the hemisphere that makes up the Americas. The other current moved westward until it was stopped by the Atlantic Ocean. The Vikings sent feelers across this barrier but not until 1492 did the barrier become a bridge. And not until 1519-1521, when Hernán Cortés boldly attacked Mexico and conquered it, did the two currents of humanity finally and definitely merge. Intermarriage developed and has continued in Mexico to this day.

Asiatics who had become Europeans married Asiatics who had become "Indians," and the human race, long divided, again became one race.

The civilization which Cortés found, and which his literary soldier described in the celebrated chronicle, was an almost incredible thing and it is no wonder that advance stories of it, seeping through to the approaching conquerors, whetted their natural appetites to the point of sheer greed, which they scarcely bothered to cloak with pious phrases. Says Parkes: "Enriched by the loot of a hundred triumphant campaigns, Tonochtitlán, the Aztec capital—now Mexico City—acquired a splendor which could scarcely be duplicated in Europe." But this splendor was an ephemeral thing, as was the momentary Aztec ascendancy. There had been other Indian races whose cultural contributions, even in Mexico, surpassed that of the Aztecs.

It is necessary, in any brief round-up of pre-conquest Mexico, to reduce the whole complex roster of races to the four which contributed most.

The *Archaic peoples*, not so much a race as a fog of primitive folk lost in antiquity and perhaps roaming the Americas as early as 15,000 B.C.; they left no great legacy yet they made a discovery, *probably on the plateau of Mexico*, that had revolutionary consequences. They discovered how to tame a plant called *teosinte* which was native only to Mexico and Central America. This was wild maize or corn and with its taming the restless, nomadic tribes of America found it possible to settle down and build cities. Mexican maize anchored civilization in the New World as wheat and barley anchored it in the Old World.

The *Mayas*, who first appeared some centuries before the birth of Christ, reached two separate peaks of importance—the so-called Old Empire, centering in Guatemala, and the

New Empire, centering in Mexico's Yucatán. According to a correlation favored by many students of their calendar and culture (and opposed by other scholars), the Guatemala period lasted from the fourth to the ninth centuries A.D. and the Yucatán renaissance lasted from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. In the latter centuries of their importance the Mayas are confusingly intertwined with the Toltecs, and their great hero, whether man or god, was so interchangeable that his "nationality" has never been determined. He was known to the Toltecs as Quetzalcoatl and to the Mayas as Kukulcan but which race bred him—or invented him—scholarship still does not know.

The Maya civilization, with its three calendars, its scientific advancement and its wonderful architectural and artistic skill, is quite the equal in interest of the Inca civilization in the Andes. It lasted very much longer than did the later Toltec and Aztec ascendancies and it influenced all the strands of culture that have followed, but it does not belong primarily to the Mexican plateau and hence it does not belong in this review. As mentioned in the Foreword on Maps, Yucatán, though politically a province of Mexico, is paired for purposes of travel with Guatemala, as it cries to be because of its geography and its historical background.

The *Toltecs* were a tribe of the linguistic family called Nahua which also produced the Aztecs and all the later migratory peoples. All of these tribes were warlike and all came from the north in successive waves. The Toltecs achieved an advanced and complicated civilization, as every traveler is quickly aware when he visits their wonderful capital, Teotihuacán (near Mexico City), with its elaborate temples and huge pyramids. There is no need to make heavy weather of that name, as many bewildered Americans do. It is merely Tay-o-tee-wah-cáhn. In this truly fabulous place

you may first become acquainted with Quetzalcoatl, whose name is also easy to pronounce—merely Ketz-al-quatl. He was many things to many Indian races, especially Toltecs and Mayas, but he is almost always represented as a plumed or feathered serpent. It is quite necessary to know Quetzalcoatl whether or not one ever goes to Yucatán and Guatemala, for the Aztecs “acquired” this god from the Toltecs and a great part of the success of Cortés was due to a superstition entertained by the Aztecs that the approaching stranger was a lieutenant of Quetzalcoatl (if not the god himself), coming according to a legendary promise to redeem his people. Instead of throwing him into an Aztec concentration camp, the emperor welcomed the supposed emissary (or god), to his own bitter cost.

The Aztecs, a fresh, vigorous, belligerent branch of the Nahua migrants, entered the Valley of Mexico (then called Anáhuac) early in the fourteenth century and presently acquired some little islands surrounded by swamp land. Here they founded the city of Tenochtitlán (easy does it, on pronunciation) which was to become within two centuries the glittering Aztec capital and then the capital of the conquerors’ Nueva España. The story of Tenochtitlán, built partly on islands, partly on piles in the briny marsh or lake, and connected by three causeways with the mainland, is one of the great and tragic stories of history; and it is history, not legend. The pre-conquest happenings are a matter of reliable record and the city, numbering perhaps a hundred thousand inhabitants, which the conquerors found has been described in much detail by excited chroniclers and by more sober historians. It was a true Venice of the New World because it was rich, haughty, imperialistic, and because its streets were canals (destined to be filled in by the demolished Aztec structures when it became the Spanish colonial capi-

tal). Many Aztec nobles built sumptuous palaces around open patios, and tribute was exacted from the lesser tribes for hundreds of miles around. The Aztecs delighted in wars because they always won and could then have a handy excuse to levy new imposts and "reparations."

Their tribal god was Mexitl (more commonly and clumsily known as Huitzilopochtli) and the people themselves were called Mexica. By an easy transition the conquerors applied the name to the entire country and hence was born the word Mexico. The place where the Mexicans settled had special appeal because of the ease with which it could be defended, but also it was pointed out to them by their god who had bidden them settle at the point where they should find an eagle on a cactus plant devouring a snake. They found such an eagle, so engaged, on one of the islands of Lake Texcoco and laid the foundations of their capital there. The eagle attacking the serpent is the familiar symbol of modern Mexico, seen on the national flag, on various coins, on the façades of government buildings and elsewhere.

The character of the early Indians—and it was substantially the same in all the tribes, though the Mayas far surpassed the others in matters of personal cleanliness—is of much more than historic or academic interest to the traveler for it is the character of Mexicans today. Mexico is an Indian nation, not a Spanish nation with many submerged Indians, as is true of Peru and Ecuador. John Gunther emphasized the fact that "The three greatest men in Mexican history, Cortés excepted, were pure or almost pure Indians—Juárez, Porfirio Díaz (a great man whether you like him or not), and Lázaro Cárdenas." The pre-conquest Indians were patient to the point of stoicism. Today's Mexicans are infinitely placid about waiting for anything or anybody. Two

hours spent in a queue, waiting to buy a railroad ticket or even a single postage stamp for the letter so tightly clutched, seems to them normal and rather pleasant. A similar period of waiting for someone—*anyone*—who is late for an appointment leaves the wait-er totally unruffled, whereas a normal American begins to fume after ten or fifteen minutes.

Courtesy was second nature to the Indians of old. It is second nature to Mexicans of today—to the very great benefit of travelers.

Enjoyment of simple pleasures—of flowers and music, of fireworks and religious celebrations—was the breath of life to the Mexica as it is to the Mexicans.

Life was cheap and it is cheap today. In 1487, when a new temple was dedicated in Tenochtitlán, some twenty thousand human victims were sacrificed to the Aztec god, and the gaudily robed priests were splashing in blood from dawn to dusk. Such practices vanished with the conquest but life has remained cheap to this day. It is partly for that reason that rebellions and internecine wars have flourished so luxuriantly.

The obstinate tenacity of the race, the clinging to tradition and to the established way of life, can be considered the outstanding characteristic of Mexicans. Like conservatism in any form, it has its virtues and its defects. The most typically Mexican sound today is the slapping of tortillas by horny-handed women in every town and village. One hears it in many parts of Mexico City (though not on the Paseo de la Reforma!). Exactly the same sounds were heard by Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo. They were heard by Moctezuma II and Moctezuma I, by the hero-god Quetzalcoatl, by the first Maya who appeared on the scene a few centuries before Christ. And the sounds were then probably thirty-five centuries old. The sound is a symbol. Mexico can-

not be "modernized" overnight by outside influences nor by its own government. The mighty force of tradition may be by-passed in some instances but it cannot be brushed aside.

#### B. THE IMPACT OF SPAIN

The story of the impact of Spain upon Mexico is acted out or danced out in village pageantry in many a Mexican fiesta. Local Indians in full regalia, with multicolored pants, ribboned slippers and enormous chicken-feather head-dresses, are the actors (dancers) and they usually devote a half day, or even a whole day, to it for the pleasure of the populace, not to mention their own enjoyment. To fortify their histrionic and terpsichorean talents they consume vast quantities of mezcal—or of tequila if they can get it, or of pulque if they cannot get mezcal, all being products of their own cactus. A full liter, just under a quart, of the murderous liquid fire is considered an adequate dram for an average performer but they carry it amazingly well and are rarely seen drunk since the show must go on.

I watched the play—or perhaps one should call it a ballet—for some three hours in the village of Zimatlán, near Oaxaca, and was fascinated by the crude color and barbarous energy of it. Mixtec Indians, who are tall, handsome fellows, were selected to play the parts of Moctezuma, his court and his army, while the Spanish invaders were played by Zapotecs (who are a head shorter), and by ill-favored boys who had not attained their growth. Cortés was played by an evil-looking villain suitable for hissing. An unexpected touch was La Malinche (called also Malintzin and Marina), Cortés' celebrated interpreter and mistress. She was played by a girl of seven who was ravishingly beautiful in a long blue gown, blue slippers and a prodigious picture hat, with

a vast blue plume. She strutted like a small peacock and her father, in a natty gray suit and pink shirt, was on the periphery of the show fairly bursting with pride. I congratulated him and was allowed to shake hands with the charming little concubine. Evidently the village of Zimatlán picked its loveliest little girl for the part and was in no wise troubled by the original Malinche's laxity of morals—unlike the good Prescott, who wrote, in the prose of his period: "Her errors . . . should be charged to the evil influence of him to whom, in the darkness of her spirit, she looked with simple confidence to guide her." (Before looking to Cortés she looked to his friend Alonso Hernández Puertocarrero, but the girl was so charming that Cortés simply took her.)

A show like this means twice as much to the beholder if he has recently read some full account—and Prescott's remains the best—of the wonderful anabasis made by Cortés and his bold band from Vera Cruz to Tenochtitlán. It is a story of almost unparalleled courage and resourcefulness, worthy of a better underlying theme than rapacity and glory.

The main facts may be set down here. In 1518, Diego Velásquez de León, governor of Cuba, picked the young man Hernán Cortés—who had once been his private secretary but was then a young-man-about-Cuba—to organize an expedition to explore the unknown land to the west. This mysterious land, rumored to contain large and opulent cities and even an "empire" in the interior, had already been hastily visited—on the coast only—by two previous expeditions. Cortés accepted the assignment and set about his preparations with such astounding energy that Velásquez, in sudden panic lest the young man supersede him in power and importance, sought to call the whole thing off. He was too late. Cortés, hearing of it, set sail immediately from Santiago de Cuba, before the governor could stop him. He cruised



about the fringes of the island for three months, picking up crews, "marines" and the materials of warfare, and finally set sail in February, 1519, for Yucatán. His force consisted of eleven ships, five hundred soldiers, with ten brass guns and four falconets, and by far the most important of all, *sixteen horses*.

Luck was with him in a hundred ways, but notably in two. He early acquired interpreters; and the Aztec emperor became convinced that he was, as we have said, the returning god Quetzalcoatl, or at least the god's direct emissary. Cortés cleverly used his sixteen horses and his fourteen metal tubes that spat out lightning and death-dealing thunder to strengthen immeasurably the rumors of his divine origin or mission.

The interpreters were a team of two: Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spanish castaway from an earlier expedition who had learned the Mayan tongue and whom Cortés luckily picked up in Yucatán; and the beautiful Malinche whom he picked up in Tabasco. Malinche was an Aztec cacique's daughter whose wicked mother had sold her secretly into slavery. She was sold a second time to Mayas in the Tabasco province and was given by them, with nineteen other maidens, as tribute to the white conqueror. Cortés spoke with Aguilar in Spanish; Aguilar could speak with Malinche in Mayan; she could speak with the Aztecs in their own tongue. By this circuitous route messages could be sent and by the return route the answers could be received. But the clever girl, a born linguist, soon picked up a colloquial knowledge of the Castilian speech and this shortened the business.

On Good Friday of 1519, Cortés finally landed at the spot which he named Vera Cruz (True Cross) and was at last in direct touch with the Aztecs. The founding of this town was a political maneuver since it enabled Cortés to proclaim

himself and his band self-governing citizens of New Spain under the direct control of the Spanish crown rather than under the peevish governor of Cuba. Cortés was promptly chosen captain-general, which entitled him to one fifth of all the loot obtained by the expedition, another fifth going to King Charles I, who was likewise the great Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. This loot was already starting to roll in nicely. Moctezuma sent to Cortés the turquoise and feather mask of Quetzalcoatl and two enormous disks of solid gold and silver from the chief temple, representing the sun and the moon. Cortés asked outright for a helmetful of gold dust and this glittering present, too, was promptly sent.

It was at this point that Cortés burned his ships to prevent retreat or defection. And if he only scuttled them, as some claim, it was still an act of boldness which history was to call sheer folly if things went against him, sheer heroism if things went for him—as they did. Cortés, like Pizarro in Peru, was ruthless, cruel, wily. Like Pizarro, he considered treachery an integral part of warfare. But glory more than personal greed motivated him and he did have certain worthy impulses not connected with either. For one thing, he strove, with a recklessness which often hampered his military strategy, to abolish the religious custom of human sacrifice which he encountered everywhere on his march; and this was only in small part because he foresaw that his own men and he himself might be desirable morsels for the bloody gods. He had no fear of death.

Two points on his march from Vera Cruz to Tenochtitlán (and for the exact course I would refer you to a map in the *National Geographic* of September, 1940) are of outstanding interest to today's traveler. They are Cholula and the volcano Popocatepetl. Cholula, near the present Puebla, was a center of Toltec culture and was famous as the sacred pil-

grimace city of Quetzalcoatl. It boasted a huge pyramid (still dominating the landscape and now crowned with a Christian church) and some four hundred temples. Here, thanks to the girl Malinche, Cortés learned of a plot against him, instigated by the Aztecs. He decoyed some three thousand Cholulans and Aztec "porters" inside the temple enclosure and massacred every one. Then he erected a Christian cross atop the pyramid and proceeded to destroy and burn the city and its four hundred temples (called *teocallis*). He vowed that he would erect a church on the site of each destroyed *teocalli* and he did indeed make great headway toward it. About one hundred and sixty of these churches and their successors now dot the landscape of this small *población* and make it one of the most distinctive towns in all Mexico.

The route led from Cholula over a lofty pass between the live volcano Popocatepetl, which still smokes occasionally, and the extinct one, Ixtaccíhuatl, the "Sleeping Lady," forming together the chief show piece of Mexican scenery in all ages. The mystery of the former lured one of Cortés' captains, Diego de Ordaz, to make the hard ascent, which is worth mentioning here because Cortés was destined to make dramatic use of this mountain in his hour of direst need. When his supply of gunpowder was exhausted he had one of his soldiers lowered into the crater to gather sulphur, so that more powder could be made. Washington at Valley Forge showed no greater tenacity and resourcefulness than Cortés in the Valley of Mexico.

The taking, losing, and retaking of Tenochtitlán may be very briefly sketched, though every detail of the tense story is exciting. The Spaniards entered it—between two rows of Aztec nobles in all their splendor—in November, 1519. Moctezuma was brought forward in a jeweled litter and Cortés

rode the causeway on his horse. The emperor left his litter and the captain-general dismounted from his horse. Two leaders, representing the two streams of "Asiatic" culture, finally met and eyed each other. Moctezuma perceived that Cortés was a man like himself but he was more certain than ever that the Spaniard was an authorized representative of Quetzalcoatl. He gave him and his men a palace within the city and the Spaniards settled down there, well aware that their palace could become a trap and that the causeways could be quickly cut.

Cortés' monumental boldness was never more in evidence than now. Although the Spaniards were but four hundred against a hundred thousand possible enemies, he invaded the emperor's quarters, kidnaped him and made him a prisoner. Then he insisted that the worship of Huitzilopochtli, and especially the practice of human sacrifice, must cease. His demand was not instantly granted so Cortés himself climbed to the top of the sacred pyramid and set about smashing the idols, like a veritable Carrie Nation attacking the demon rum. He had an image of the Virgin set up and ordered the singing of hymns and the celebration of mass. It was a piece of effrontery almost beyond the imagination, as if a small band of Orientals were to invade Washington, seize the president, tear down the Washington Cathedral and set up a statue of Gautama Buddha. But Cortés succeeded. The Aztecs, stunned by his limitless nerve, actually seemed to accept him as their new master.

For six months all was well. Then Pedro de Alvarado, a lieutenant whom Cortés had left in charge of Tenochtitlán while he attended to matters elsewhere, spilled the beans and the maize and the whole rich meal of conquest. In a moment of panic, during a religious celebration of the Aztecs which he imagined was to be climaxed by sacrificing

the Spaniards to the outraged pagan god, he ordered an indiscriminate massacre of the celebrants. The people rose in fury and fought the Spaniards to a standstill despite their terrifying arms and ordnance. The battle raged madly for a week and finally, on June 30, 1520, those Spaniards who were not slaughtered or drowned made their pitiable escape from the city. This was the famous *noche triste*—sad night—but history should make a courteous nod also to the sad afternoon of the Aztec innocents who were slaughtered in thousands because Alvarado lost his head.

*La noche triste* should have been the occasion for the utter collapse of Cortés and his dreams of glory but it served only to stimulate his unquenchable spirit. Although vastly embittered by Alvarado's stupidity, he set about retrieving his fortunes. In a year and a month and thirteen days he retook the city, this time without benefit of godhood, for the illusion had been smashed to atoms. Also, he was hampered by the fact that the gentle and tractable Moctezuma had been killed and had been succeeded by a nephew, Cuauhtémoc, who was made of far sterner stuff. Cortés, as usual, mixed cruelty with heroism. Because his men were disappointed at the smallness of the loot (much of which had actually been plundered and lost in the lake by the escaping or drowning Spaniards on the "sad night"), he consented to let Cuauhtémoc be tortured, in the hope that he would reveal hidden caches of treasure. The imperial feet were covered with oil and set afire but Cuauhtémoc endured it without the slightest flinching and revealed nothing. Be it said for Cortés that he was presently ashamed of himself and ordered the emperor released, but he could not restore the burned feet.

A little later Cuauhtémoc was executed on suspicion of hatching a plot—and thus died the last Aztec emperor, and

with him the empire. An imposing statue of this magnificent pagan now occupies the most conspicuous glorieta on the Paseo de la Reforma of Mexico City. By this tardy tribute Spanish Mexico eases its conscience toward the Aztec race which it dispossessed. The personal story of Cortés ends in anticlimax. He extended his conquest to the whole of Mexico and Central America but he had increasing trouble with rival administrators and finally he retired to Andalusia with little more than his memories and the empty title of Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca. There, a quarter of a century after his great days, he died in obscurity.

The impact of Spain merged into a steady pressure of imperialistic exploitation. An admirable though futile figure during more than half a century was the idealistic and humanitarian Spanish priest, Bartolomé de las Casas. He fought with unflagging zeal and singleness of purpose to relieve the oppressed. At last, in 1542, he induced Charles, the king-emperor, to issue new and stringent laws for the protection of the Indians, including a law to abolish slavery; but they were so angrily opposed by the privileged classes in Mexico that they were promptly rescinded, whereupon the Spaniards praised God and celebrated with glittering fiestas. Las Casas, then seventy, fought on and on, ever noble, ever futile, and died at the age of ninety, still fighting for his beloved Indians.

The three centuries subsequent to the arrival of Cortés are not an inspiring portion of Mexico's history, nor even interesting, except from the artistic point of view. The church was so rich and powerful that it could and did wink at corruption, but at least it was able to advance its own glory by acting as patron of the arts. Literally dozens of great churches were built during the colonial era and as a

whole they are a delight to the eye, the usual baroque of the period taking on, in later years, an exuberance of ornament unmatched by rococo architecture anywhere else. This peculiar form of lavish over-ornamentation, often called "debased baroque," was introduced in the early 1700's by the royal architect, José Churriguera, and has been given his name—churrigueresque. It is a frankly whipped cream style. The carvings in stone and wood are of remarkable intricacy and effervescence, and interior decorations go in for pink and gold coloring with many fancy scrolls and with innumerable angels and cupids. If you are condemning all this out of hand I would urge you to withhold judgment until you have seen the two façades of the cathedral sagrario in Mexico City and until you have seen the dazzling effects in the churches of Querétaro, Guanajuato, Tepozotlán and Taxco. Secular churrigueresque is astonishingly presented in Puebla in the frosted confection called Casa del Alfeñique, now a provincial museum.

Pre-Churriguera architecture, which still remains in numerous examples, is also fascinating for its sumptuous Spanish baroque. The best of these earlier churches is the opulent Santo Domingo in Oaxaca, but one finds many another in Puebla, Morelia, Guadalajara, and San Miguel de Alende. One could, in fact, name almost any town in the heart of Mexico and be sure of finding one or several good churches there. Among the 160 in Cholula is a perfect Mudéjar (Moorish) church, the Capilla Real, with a honeycomb of little domes strikingly like those of the mosque in Cordova (Spain). There are more than thirteen thousand churches in the Republic of Mexico and almost all of them date from the colonial period, to the great enhancement of travel pleasure even though one actually enters no more than thirteen of them.

Of painters who attained local eminence in the colonia period I will name none (though Manuel Toussaint name five hundred), and of *littérateurs* I will name but one, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Born in 1651, and endowed almost from babyhood with precocious abilities, she began as a tiny child to compose verses. She is said to have learned Latin at the age of eight and soon to have spoken it with utmost fluency. She became nationally famous as a prodigy and the viceroy engaged her while still in her early 'teens as a maid of honor to the vicereine. At the age of seventeen she became a nun in the convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City and here she lived the rest of her life. She was a freak of nature, a poetess who could write with tender feeling in an age when feeling had been crushed by church and state into a pretentious and artificial mold. The delicacy of her *sonetos* and longer poems has excited the wonder of all who have studied her work. Manuel Toussaint called her name "*sin disputa, el más importante de nuestras letras coloniales.*" Others have called her the most sensitive woman poet of the Americas. I know an erudite Mexican lady who gives regular courses of lectures on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and I have been told by her husband that it is her considered opinion that the Mexican nun possessed poetic gifts so exquisite that they have never been surpassed in delicacy of expression. That is strong talk. I have read in Spanish some of the sonnets, wishing I had a fuller knowledge and appreciation of the language from which no one can adequately translate them. I have studied the nun's pensive face, which seems not at all *troublante*, and have wondered, as one does when gazing at the more vapid portraits of Shakespeare, what is the consistency of genius and whence comes so special a gift. Sor Juana Inés was herself a painter of considerable note and a self-portrait has found its way to the Penn



sylvania Museum in Philadelphia, but one knows not how much credence to place in any such revelation. She told with her paint brush whatever she chose to tell.

### C. FROM INDEPENDENCE TO FREEDOM

Oppression and Special Privilege have always made a smooth working team to lay the foundations of rebellion and so it was in Mexico as the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth. The *gachupines* (a nickname given by Mexicans to European-born whites) were at the top of the Special Privilege ladder. They skimmed the cream of colonial wealth for themselves and took all the best jobs. The *creoles*, who were American-born whites, came next and did well by themselves in trade. The *mestizos*, of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, were unhappy nondescripts far below the creoles, but by persistent effort they managed to win some small degree of economic standing. The *Indians*, of course, were at the base of the ladder, with no hope of getting up even to the first rung. They were abject slaves, accustomed to want as they were accustomed to weather. They knew that not much could be done about either.

But something was done after all—to relieve want. It required three major upheavals to produce the *very relative* economic freedom which is enjoyed by even the poorest of Mexicans today and one must be aware of the upheavals to appreciate the cities and towns and even the sublime scenery (so often the enemy of prosperity) encountered in Mexico. I refer to the Mexican War of Independence (1810-21); the War of the Reform (1858-61); THE Revolution (1910-11 and socially to the present day). There were strange interludes, harsh wars, and exciting personalities not included in these major events but it is the three periods listed above that

have essentially shaped modern Mexico.

The War of Independence was not planned. It merely happened, in 1810. One is reminded of Parícutín Volcano, which happened in a Michoacán cornfield in 1943. The fuse of Independence was lighted almost inadvertently in the town of Querétaro. A group of earnest persons formed a literary and social club which devoted itself less to literature and sociabilities than to academic discussions of Independence. The corregidor and corregidora of the town were its earliest leaders. Various army officers were attracted, including a bold and restless young man named Ignacio Allende. He in turn drew in a quiet and scholarly cleric about sixty years of age named Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the parish priest of the small town of Dolores in the state of Guanajuato. Things moved very fast. The group planned to incite the creoles to expel the gachupines from Mexico, perhaps without a fight. Their plan was discovered and the discovery touched off the fuse. The grim-looking corregidora, dwelling above the Querétaro town jailer, signalled to him by a prearranged system of tapping, that all was known. The jailer instantly warned Allende, who did a Paul Revere by galloping in hot haste to Dolores to warn Hidalgo. The priest, acting purely on impulse, rang the church bell to summon his Indian parishioners. Then, in an impromptu harangue, he told them that the detested gachupines were to be driven from the country. This was the celebrated *Grito* (Cry) *de Dolores*.

It was like saying that an investing army was to be expelled by moonbeams for the rebels had no organization, no money, no weapons. All they had was a burning hatred but it proved to be almost enough to enable them to win immediate victory. Almost but not quite. The fight raged furiously and at first with astonishing success all over the coun-

try, but in less than a year the leaders were dead. The grisly heads of Hidalgo, Allende, and two of their valiant lieutenants (Aldama and Jiménez) were placed in four swinging iron cages at the four corners of a grain warehouse (Alhóndiga de Granaditas) in Guanajuato town. There they remained for ten years, until the cause for which their owners had been martyred was finally won. Shortly thereafter they were sent to rest in patriotic glory in Mexico City's cathedral, first under the Altar of the Kings and later in the San José chapel, whence they were taken in more recent years to repose at the base of the Independence Monument.

Another priest, named José María Morelos of the town of Valladolid (later to be re-named for him Morelia), joined the rebellion and he picked up the torch that Hidalgo had been forced to drop. With vastly better planning and organization, this able and clear-thinking man—a great man by any yardstick—came even nearer to winning success than had the impetuous Hidalgo, but he too was borne down by fate and was executed in 1814. It was left for an able but insincere colonel, Agustín de Iturbide, to win real independence from Spain, only to vitiate the accomplishment by having himself presently proclaimed Emperor Agustín the First. Nevertheless, Mexico was at long last rid of Spanish rule.

It was on September 27, 1821, that Iturbide entered Mexico City in triumph at the head of the curiously named *trigarantine* army. This referred to the *three guarantees* of the so-called Plan of Iguala, adopted as a plan of Independence at the town of Iguala, just south of Taxco. They were as follows: (1) Mexico to be governed by "some European prince"; (2) the church to retain its traditional privileges; (3) the creoles and gachupines to be equal in every way. Even before his triumph Iturbide let the imperial cat—or kitten—out of the bag by announcing, not too subtly, that

the future ruler of Mexico need not necessarily be a prince of a European royal house.

The church played a curiously jumbled role in the long struggle. There were, in fact, as Hubert Herring has pointed out, "two Churches in 1810—the Church of the bishops and the landholders, and the Church of the village clergy. The Archbishop of Mexico had a salary of 130,000 pesos a year; the village priest often no more than 130 pesos." Each Church had its own Virgin and one of the oddest situations in all religious history developed as the two Virgins engaged in bitter warfare.

The gentle Virgin of Guadalupe was the dearly loved protectress of the oppressed Indians and of the village clergy, including Hidalgo and Morelos. The Virgin of los Remedios was the proud and aristocratic patroness of the Spanish army. She was, in fact, proclaimed by one of the viceroys its commanding general, this "promotion" being accomplished in a glittering ceremony in the cathedral of Mexico City. In many a bloody battle the two Virgins met and each was implored to bring victory to the side of her own espousal. In the end Guadalupe won because she had humanity on her side and humanity will not forever be denied. She still fights for the oppressed and is still devotedly loved as anyone may see for himself by watching the faces of the faithful as they worship her.

The War of the Reform is important to the traveler if for no other reason than that it explains the word *Reforma*, which one encounters all over Mexico. The capital's leading boulevard and leading hotel are named for the Reform, to the puzzlement of many tourists who never find out the origin of the name. It is not unusual for Americans to worry lest they are being booked for reservations in a temperance

hotel when a travel agent in the States tells them he has secured accommodations in the *Reforma*. But if this comment is trivial the Reform itself was anything but trivial. It brought the best leadership and the best spirit that Mexico has had, and the best hope, too, until the coming of the Revolution in the present century.

Specifically, it brought to the scene Benito Juárez, one of the few conspicuous statesmen in history whom one can admire without serious reservation, as one admires Abraham Lincoln and Count Cavour. Juárez was a swarthy Zapotec Indian, a native of Oaxaca, and he came up the hard way. He lived the hard way, too, and even when he became president he never softened his uncompromising devotion to the submerged four-fifths by accepting an easy life for himself at their expense. He had as a foil for his record the short-lived empire of Iturbide, the antics of General Santa Ana, Mexico's most successful opportunist, and the dismal war with the United States, whereby Mexico lost the vast territories of Texas and California. Oppression and Special Privilege were still the drivers of the Mexican chariot and the Church of the bishops and landholders was riding again.

President Juárez was the implacable foe of privilege. He authored the Constitution of 1857 which embodied the reforms for which he was to spend the rest of his life fighting. These included free popular education; freedom of speech and of the press; the abolition of class legislation and the sharp curbing of the military and ecclesiastical courts; the separation of church and state; and the general curtailing of the church's vast power. The religious orders were suppressed outright and their rich holdings were largely confiscated. Marriage was henceforth to be legal with a mere civil ceremony. Of course the princes of the church let out

a howl of pain that was heard far beyond the borders of Mexico. It was heard clearly in Europe.

The three years' War of Reform, which put the new laws into effect and established Juárez (in 1861) as constitutional president of the country, was a military triumph; but Mexico was financially ruined and she could not continue interest payments on her foreign debt. Europe stepped in. Britain, Spain and France took joint action and a force was landed at Vera Cruz to take over the collection of customs. France presently pushed on alone and took over the country, setting up the Austrian prince Maximilian as "emperor" and supporting him with French troops. This was achieved despite a setback at Puebla, the famous Juarista victory of May 5, 1862, for which streets all over the country are still named Cinco de Mayo. Maximilian lasted for five years but when the United States forced the withdrawal of French troops he was left helpless. Presently he was caught and executed (in Querétaro, June 19, 1867) and Juárez, who had been carrying on the struggle from places of hiding or outright exile, returned to the national leadership. In another five years he in turn died, and without achieving apparent success, though the spirit he injected into Mexico was the sure foundation for success four decades later.

The Maximilian interlude has been embroidered by much romantic writing and by sentimental thought. He was a well-intentioned man utterly unable to head up so ruthless a régime as is basic to foreign domination of any country. He has been glamorized because he looked noble in his tawny beard, because he had bad luck, because his wife, Carlotta, in attempting to help him broke down and went mad, and above all, because he died with true heroism, refusing to escape unless his comrades in arms could be res-

cued with him. Carlotta, never regaining her sanity, died in a château near Brussels as recently as 1927.

The Díaz dictatorship may serve here chiefly as a backdrop for the Revolution—THE Revolution one may emphasize again—which overthrew and supplanted it. Díaz was an exceedingly able man and though a mestizo by birth and, like Juárez, a native of Oaxaca, he had an abiding predilection for the privileged classes. He was the very personification of successful tyranny. Setting aside the constitutional law against a president succeeding himself, he ruled with iron hand for thirty-five years. Elections were held at routine intervals but his henchmen counted the votes and had but to announce victory each time. It mattered not a bit how many actual votes he received. Perhaps he would even have been ashamed to be popular with the masses.

Díaz built railroads and opened up the mineral and petroleum wealth of Mexico, allowing foreign financial interests to exploit the country's wealth on a great scale without fear of serious restraint. Order prevailed and Mexico was, so to speak, well rated by Dun and Bradstreet. The smart or lucky upper crust waxed fat and life was very pleasant. The Virgin of los Remedios was presumably happy but the Virgin of Guadalupe was sad. Her worshippers were in greater misery than ever and their rescue seemed more remote than even in colonial times. The land rumbled with a suppressed but furious discontent. The dictator, however, could not hear the noise and he went his way contentedly. Approximately on his eightieth birthday came the centennial (September 16, 1910) of the Grito de Dolores and without the slightest embarrassment at perpetrating so gross a burlesque he made it the occasion of an international fiesta in Mexico City. The party cost twenty million pesos and historians re-

cord that twenty carloads of champagne were consumed at a single all-night ball in the National Palace, a thing which anyone can believe who has attended a dictator's party anywhere in Latin America. Such goings on were not calculated to allay the growing bitterness of the poor and Mexico grew so ripe and overripe for revolution that before the end of that same year the country literally exploded. By the next spring things were too hot for the aging dictator and he slipped quietly away to Paris, whose Elysian Fields have always been the heaven and haven of rich exiles. There he lived quietly for his four remaining years while the wind swept Mexico.

#### D. THE COLORS OF REVOLUTION

The slightest spark was enough to touch off the revolution and that spark was Francisco I. Madero, as mild a *Milque-toast* as could have been found in all Mexico. The unarguable rightness of his cause won him such instant support that he found himself almost against his will a national leader. He was scarcely over five feet in height and unlike another little man—from Corsica—his appearance was wholly insignificant. His voice was so high-pitched that in speeches before large gatherings it could and did squeak distressingly; and he had a facial tic which was devastating to dignity. Madero really had almost nothing but an honest cause and that was enough.

He was a liberal, stemming from a very wealthy family of creoles in the northern state of Coahuila, a family numbering in its immediate circle and in collateral branches nearly two hundred male members of greater or lesser business vigor. The family, wedded to traditional ideas of privilege, regarded young Francisco as the "tiresome one" of the



group, forever thinking and talking of queer humanitarian ideas and even putting them into practice. On his own cotton plantation he devoted every peso of profits to improving the housing, education, and medical conditions of his peons. It was easy for his uncles and brothers and cousins to demonstrate the mathematical absurdity of such a performance, leading straight to insolvency. But the very incompetence of Madero—if the term is not too severe—was enough to prove the validity of his cause. He launched the revolution with such ineptitude that the dictator and his circle, secure in their great power, must have roared with honest laughter. Madero asserted that there must be a free election in 1910 in accordance with the constitution. He wrote a mild book, *La Sucesión Presidencial*, organized anti-reelectionist clubs and started a newspaper to support them. He even secured an interview with Díaz and told the aged tyrant in timid fashion that he was trying to make the Mexican electorate more conscious of citizenship and its privileges.

"An excellent idea," said Díaz, with a straight face. He himself was anxious only to follow the will of the people, as he had always done.

Shortly afterward, as Madero's popularity increased alarmingly, Díaz took the usual precaution of throwing him into jail on a charge of sedition. Then he forgot him and went about the business of having himself re-elected for a new six-year term. This was achieved by the customary foolproof method of having his own henchmen count the votes. It was presently announced that Madero had mustered only 196. "Too bad," said Díaz in effect; and again the old man bowed to the will of the electorate and remained president, surrounded by a little group of almost equally old men who were called *Científicos*. They never interfered with the en-

gine of dictatorship but merely oiled it and helped to keep it humming.

But popular hatred was volcanic. It blazed of itself, and kept blazing. Madero, released on bail, fled to Texas but soon re-entered Mexico and carried on the fight in a curiously mild way. His continual willingness to compromise with his foe made his leadership of doubtful value but the momentum of the Revolution was terrific. Within nine months Díaz was sailing for refuge in Europe on the German ship *Ypiranga*. Within another six months Madero became the first Mexican president ever chosen by the people in completely free elections. The Revolution was launched, but it was not a thing with a beginning, middle and ending. It was and is today a state of mind, a continuing force, an unsuppressible demand of a downtrodden populace which knows its power. It is doubtful if any Mexican strong man, however powerful his foreign connections, can ever again ignore it. In fact, it is virtually certain that he cannot. All politicians, from the most patriotic to the most grasping, recognize this force as axiomatic and make haste to proclaim themselves a part of it. No one can deviate too far for too long from giving it actual support as against lip service. For us Miss Brenner states the case with clarity. "It is a living story underneath what happens in Mexico now, and tomorrow. *La Revolución*—is the past, and it is a set of beliefs. The phrase runs like a live current through everything public and personal, too; politics and art and business and thought and industry." And of its peculiar importance in Western Hemisphere diplomacy she says: "Because of Mexico's immediate revolutionary past, the country is something like a school for liberal policy-makers in many other Latin-American republics; its moral leadership is far beyond its size."

The drama of the living revolution is fascinating, espe-

cially as it relates to the Church, to the controversy over the subsoil wealth of the country (particularly oil) and to the drastic land distributions. And the part which Mexican artists have played; and still play, in the unfolding plot is equally enthralling. The artists will be discussed in Chapter 9, but the other topics need brief comment here.

The Church, after long and harsh persecution brought on by its own recurring tendency to amass wealth and to side with Special Privilege, is now coming back. The very great majority of Mexicans, of whatever social standing, can be counted as loyal Catholics, but the oppressed four-fifths have hated the hierarchy, and the government has cracked down on the Church in order to keep its own good and regular standing as a revolutionary government. President Avila Camacho's widely reported confession of faith ("I am a believer") has done much to restore ecclesiastical prestige.

The oil controversy has "much to be said on both sides." But basically the foreign interests invited a showdown with the Revolution and took a beating from it. Foreigners, especially the absentee owners of vast properties, simply did not know the strength of the thing with which they grappled.

The distribution of land was a very drastic new-dealish performance (50,000,000 acres expropriated by Cárdenas alone; 882,000 families provided with land to work in *ejido* or communal villages), but it did go a long way to allay the terrible bitterness of the peons.

The chief figures of the Revolution, both the fighting part and the continuing political part, are the most colorful features of the pageant. Among the fighters the two most conspicuous figures of the early days, aside from those already mentioned, were Pancho Villa, the "generous bandit," and Emiliano Zapata, the fierce peasant leader whose theatrical

appearance belied his ability. He fought for *land*, which was the central stem of the core of the Revolution. You may see him in many a mural, notably in those of the Palacio de Cortés in Cuernavaca which Diego Rivera painted and for which Dwight Morrow paid.

The many political figures of the struggle have been vastly confusing to the average American and need not be recalled in detail. One can judge something of their individual revolutionary odor by noting whether or not they have had streets and squares and towns named for them. One does not see such honors bestowed upon Huerta or Calles, but one does find the names Carranza and Obregón. Of all the Revolution's presidents, Lázaro Cárdenas, who is still very active, has left by far the biggest name. He really put the Revolution into effect. And when foreign capital yelled like a banshee he let it yell and went steadily about his business. His successor, General Manuel Avila Camacho, has edged back to the middle of the road and has made cooperation with the United States a major feature of his administration. His foreign minister, Ezequiel Padilla, has been an outstanding figure of international statesmanship, placing Mexico, rather to its own bewilderment, for its grievances against the United States have been many and of long standing, in the camp of our Better Neighbors.

Among political parties it is necessary to know at least of the existence of these three: (1) P.N.R. (National Revolutionary Party), which is the government no matter who is president; (2) C.T.M. (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*), which is the powerful labor federation, more or less analogous to C.I.O. and largely built up by a tough boss named Lombardo Toledano; (3) the Cristeros (literally Christers), who have been the rightist and militant church wing. The Cristeros had their most dramatic moment in

1923 when an ecclesiastical assembly of at least fifty thousand persons met on a hill above Guanajuato and in a moving ceremony unveiled a monument to the "King of Mexico," who was none other than Jesus Christ. On countless thousands of walls all over Mexico appeared the sign *Viva Cristo Rey!* A prolonged religious struggle was touched off. Obregón, and then Calles, enforced the repressive church laws, including the requirement that priests must register, and in retaliation the Church literally went on strike. Religious zealots, taking things into their own hands, organized raids and after killing opponents often planted on the bodies of their victims the sign "Christ the King!" For several years the Church almost ceased to function in Mexico except as a nursery of civil war but at last Ambassador Dwight Morrow was able to effect a compromise and things have worked out with increasing smoothness, especially since President Avila Camacho's ringing declaration. One still sees on many a wall the stencilled statement, movingly pious but of bloody potentialities: *Viva Cristo Rey! En mi Corazón; En mi Casa; En mi Patria.*

The social laboratory that is Mexico is a place of undying interest to all visitors who do not shut their eyes to it. Forbearance is often necessary but it has been equally necessary equally often on the other side. The will to understand is one of the rarest of human powers. It is an evidence of strength. Even the most transient of tourists will contribute his worthy bit to inter-American solidarity by striving to develop whatever of this power is in him.

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## YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Mexico City, Center of Everything*

#### A. CANDID NOTES ON HOTELS

MEXICO, D. F., is enormous. Larger than Madrid, Barcelona and, with the single exception of Buenos Aires, all other cities that speak Spanish, it is not a place to be entered blindly, trusting that an hour's taxi ride and a couple of strolls will familiarize one with its main features. A full week is about the shortest time in which one can become superficially acquainted with it for Mexico City is very much more than a cathedral, a castle on a hill and a tea at Sanborn's. The constellation of environs, the outlying relics of Aztec civilization and the ring of satellite cities are quite as essential to the capital picture as are the downtown streets and plazas.

Because of the overpowering importance of the capital in everyone's Mexico travels, the selection of hotel headquarters calls for more than casual thought. These candid notes must also be more than casual if they are to be really helpful.

The *Ritz* and the *Majestic* are the best downtown hostleries; the *Reforma* and the *Genève* the best places uptown. It happened, and I believe it was sheer chance, that on my first approach to the capital several years ago almost everybody I met along the way had been staying at the Reforma or had just booked reservations there so to that hotel I also

went. It was and is very good—even luxurious. Its bedrooms and baths and sumptuous suites are ultra-modern. Its beauty shop, as well as its various dining rooms, grills, bars and night clubs (operated under the name *Ciro's*) form a little city in themselves—a lively city and an *American* one, I must admit. The Reforma has submitted in recent years to wide publicity as one of the world's leading playgrounds of the "international set," and though I usually make a point of avoiding such glittering hostelries, I have continued to book at the Reforma on most visits because I like its comforts, its superlative location and its rather un-Mexican habit of keeping everything shipshape. This is due perhaps to the fact that its manager, who is also the president of the Mexican Hotel Men's Association, visits the States for periodic check-ups of American hotel habits. The Reforma plumbing works. The elevators run and you do not have to wait for them. If you phone from your room for a maid or a waiter or a valet, she or he comes with a promptness that is truly startling in the country of mañana. And the girls at the telephone switchboard struggle valiantly and with some success to cope with the sluggish service of the two telephone companies—Mexicana and Ericsson. Do these matters sound trivial or matter-of-course? Wait until you have experienced Mexico for a week or two and see how you feel about it. I promised to be candid and now I have kept my promise. The Reforma is no place in which to learn Spanish or to learn the ways of Mexico. Your own fellow-countrymen, swarming over its halls and lobbies, absolutely dominate the place as the language of America dominates the air. But to a large extent this is true also of all the other first-class hotels except possibly the Majestic. The Norteamericano has most certainly discovered Mexico City. He and his wife and children are coming nowadays in herds and flocks and shoals.

If you stay at the Reforma try by all means to secure a room on the Paseo side fairly high in the building, for you will then have a glorious view of the two famous volcanoes that are fixed "props" in the world's stage-picture of Mexico. *Popocatepetl* (correctly accented on the penult) means Smoking Mountain—and as I have said it smokes too much at times. Its altitude is 17,794 feet, being exceeded in all Mexico only by Orizaba. Its sister peak is *Ixtaccihuatl*, meaning White Woman. The coif of the White Woman is only 16,200 feet above sea level but both mountains are perpetually covered with deep snow. The letter x in Mexico is pronounced in a variety of ways but inquiry has convinced me that in this particular name it sounds like our own x. The correct pronunciation of the mountain's name, as near as it can be put into phonetics, is *Iks-tak-see-watl* without strong accent anywhere.

The Genève, pronounced in a variety of ways from French to Spanish (Héneva), is substantially farther out from town than the Reforma. It has its fans and addicts—lots of them—and it must be said that if it is a trifle less luxurious than its rival it is, by the same token, a trifle more "relaxed" in its atmosphere. It is a place where guests often stay for weeks or months and it has less of the transient atmosphere than do the others of its quality. The Genève's food is definitely good.

• The Ritz, downtown, is in the very center of centers, a stone's toss from Sanborn's and Lady Baltimore, from the chief travel agencies, from the P.A.W.A. headquarters and all the ticket offices, from the Bellas Artes Palace, from the post office and cable office and from the big movie palaces and restaurants. If the Reforma and the Genève seethe with life the Ritz roars with it. A famous fresco by Covarrubias in the bar depicts American and Mexican boating parties (at

Xochimilco) mutually taking snapshots of each other. The same thing is done with human eyes in the Ritz bar. The Mexican element is more in evidence here than in the up-town hotels but Americans still dominate the scene in lobby, bar and restaurant. The bedrooms of the Ritz, in gleaming white, are among the most cheerful I have encountered in Mexico.

The Majestic fronts on that prodigious clearing in the city's congested center called the Zócalo, which is the plaza on which the cathedral and the National Palace each has its enormous frontage, not to mention the National Pawn Shop (*Monte de Piedad*). This hotel, a bit quieter than the Ritz and much more Mexican, is well placed for those who propose to take their educational sightseeing seriously. Most of the city's historic palaces, churches and museums are within easy walking distance for this very square was the center of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, and the center also of the Spanish-colonial city. Despite the capital's westward trend the Zócalo remains the heart of the modern capital. From this throbbing metropolitan heart trolley cars, buses and taxis by the thousand radiate to every part of the city. It reminds one, in this respect, of the Puerta del Sol of Madrid.

The dining room of the Majestic calls for a special note for it is one of the capital's most appealing places. High on the roof, it overlooks the teeming Zócalo and faces the National Palace and the cathedral. Had one been dining on this spot early in 1520 one might have watched Cortés with his own hands tear down the idols of the Aztec teocalli; and later one might have watched him lay the cornerstone of the present cathedral on the exact site of the teocalli.

Lesser hotels and less expensive ones are so numerous that if I were to list them all they would darken the sky of your judgment, but a few specialties call for a few special

words apiece to complete the picture.

*Hotel Lincoln*, at 24 Calle Revillagigedo, is the newest of the first-class hotels, having been opened in 1944. It is far smaller than the others of its quality and is, therefore, more personal and quiet. Calle Revillagigedo is hard to pronounce but easy to find, since it debouches into the Avenida Juárez at the western end of the Alameda.

*Hotel Emporio*, another very new hostelry, is on the Paseo de la Reforma, almost opposite the Hotel Reforma. It is ultra-modern in design and its bedrooms and baths share this modernity. Its lofty roof-dining room and solarium boast a beautiful view of the city. The Emporio is one of the city's tallest hotels but it is much lower in price than the Big Four.

*Hotel de Cortés*, at 85 Avenida Hidalgo, opposite the northwest corner of the Alameda, is a colonial palace intelligently modernized to meet the requirements of modern travel. Its romantic appeal is great, despite the fact that it is on the edge of an extensive red light district which sometimes—and quite needlessly—scares away tourists. One may walk across the street and find oneself in the pleasant paths of the capital's pleasantest park, whose other side is the shopping and social center of the city.

*Hotel María Cristina*, fairly far uptown, beyond the Reforma, is a delightful place of residential type, with lots of space, lots of sunshine and good food.

*Shirley Courts*, uptown and a bit difficult to find, is an attractive place for motorists. Being a remodeled hacienda, it combines features of hotel and tourist camp. American-managed, it offers food which thoroughly appeals to Americans.

*Hotel Regis*, on Avenida Juárez just west of the Alameda, is one of the capital's largest hotels and is much patronized by Americans, though it cannot be called first-class in the

strictest sense. Its enormous area enables it to include a swimming pool and Turkish baths; but the popular sectors of the Regis are undoubtedly its crowded bar and its much-muraled Maya Room restaurant.

*Hotel Ontario*, near the Zócalo, is rather new and I have found it one of the best of the modestly priced hotels. It is a good place to save money without actually curbing enjoyment. It has no central heating but the hotspot electric heaters are adequate except on grimly cold days, which are extremely few. Two gigantic Basque brothers own and manage it.

Other inexpensive downtown hotels often patronized by Americans include the *Guardiola*, the *Gillow*, the *Danky*, and an attractive uptown place of modest charges is the *Hipódromo* far out on Avenida Insurgentes.

#### B. BIG CITY PRACTICALITIES

The head porter, the travel clerk, the social director and all such functionaries in any of the luxury hotels thrive on tourist timidity, which is a sort of self-imposed incompetence. Not one tourist in ten would run his business or her home on such a basis of personal helplessness but it seems to be natural to travel that way. I have heard American women consult the mail clerk or the cashier on the challenging question of how to get down town. I have heard American men consult the social director as to the exchange rate. This last, however, is not a fair example of helplessness for the director was a lovely lady, with a lovely name. In the Reforma she used to be Marguerite Smoke. And then came Elaine Dallas. What man, with a dash of romance in him, would fail to consult so charming an oracle so charmingly named? The exact topic of consultation matters little.

I have no fear of wrecking the livelihood of hotel staffs by presenting some big-city practicalities of Mexico, D. F. For those who like to know their own way around, asking questions only when they must, the findings hereinafter may be of value; and it may be mentioned parenthetically that a good little book presenting colloquial *Mexican Spanish* in the simplest form is Charles E. Kany's *Spoken Spanish*, published by D. C. Heath & Company of Boston. With those travelers who prefer, while touring, to indulge the pleasant luxury of paying others to do everything for them, including the arduous job of thinking, this present roundup is honestly sympathetic, asking only to be ignored.

*Transportation* within the limits of Mexico City is simplicity simplified. You merely hop a taxi (they cruise about continually looking for fares) and pay one or two pesos, or three at the most. The rate used to be one peso flat, day or night, and it is still so in the theory of those officials who fight inflation but actually the taxi man demands more except perhaps for the very shortest hauls. Competition is still the life of the taxi trade, as of every other, and if you care to bother with small savings while on vacation you can generally secure a one-peso car by trying in turn the first several that roll into sight. Simply call out "*Un peso,*" and see what happens. Perhaps the man will respond with a glum "*Si, señor,*" or perhaps he will say "*Uno y medio,*" in which case you will at least have saved half a peso, which is a dime. As long as the peso remains pegged at twenty cents your budget will seldom wish to wrangle but it may enjoy a bit of honest and dignified bargaining. Mexicans do it as a matter of course for to them a peso is still a unit of some importance. And Mexicans know that taxis are more numerous than even their apparently brisk business warrants. Because

of this every taxi in Mexico City must, by law, refrain from taking fares one day a week so that all may earn at least a sort of a living for their operators. A band of color—five different shades indicating Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday—is painted on the taxi indicating which is its day to “lay over.” You may readily learn these colors if curiosity prompts you to try. Saturday and Sunday are free days for all taxis; but a chauffeur caught with a fare on his off day is liable to a heavy fine.

When taxis are taken by the hour, or to points outside the city limits, a definite bargain should be struck in advance, but it may be said that all such excursions are amazingly easy on your purse. Even the long trip to the airport usually costs only four pesos though air travelers are presumed to be lavish spenders. Mexico is a land of oil and a land of very modest rewards for personal services rendered.

Local buses and trolley cars start chiefly from the Zócalo and fan out to all parts of the city in scores of lines. I should say that few Americans except permanent residents and necessitous students on thrift vacations ever use them, generally speaking, since taxis are not dear. There is, however, one notable exception. The bus line—and there is only one—which runs the length of Paseo Reforma and traverses the heart of the city to and from the Zócalo, is easy to learn and is useful to many transients who live in the uptown hotels. There are two classes, first-class buses being gray and smart looking, second-class buses being green and rattlybang. The first-class ones are by far the best local buses in the Republic of Mexico, which is to say that they are actually good. But they accept only as many passengers as can be seated, so you may have to wait while several *completos* roll past. There are no first-class standees and this rule is sternly enforced, as in all Mexican first-class buses everywhere. The



second-class buses, at ten centavos, are an adventure from start to finish. They pitch and roll like tramp steamers in a high sea and are invariably so crowded that you must stand up and cling by an eyelash or two. Even the steps are usually packed, despite stern printed warnings that it is forbidden to stand there.

*Letters, telegrams and telephones* are topics of prime and obvious interest and a bit of knowledge on this topic can save much wear and tear. Postage rates, despite several increases, are still low in terms of dollar money. All the hotels sell stamps. Present rates are as follows:

*Centavos*

Train mail to U.S.A.—

Postcards and open Christmas cards without message ..... .06

Letters—for each 10 grams ..... .12

Air mail to U.S.A.—

Postcards ..... .25

Letters—for each 5 grams, this being one thin sheet and envelope ..... .25

Mail within Mexico—

Same as above, but a special one-centavo stamp marked *Campaña contra el Paludismo* (Campaign against tuberculosis) *must be affixed*. Otherwise the letter or card will not go.

Special Delivery Stamp (*Entrega Inmediata*) ..... .20

(This is important since two or three days may elapse before an ordinary letter is delivered even in a neighboring city.)

Telegrams to the United States are surprisingly inexpensive considering distances. They may be conveniently dispatched from the Cable Office (English-speaking clerks) at the corner of San Juan de Letrán and Independencia, in

the very center of the city. Telegrams within Mexico are extremely cheap even when sent at special superspeed rates—which are not excitingly prompt at that. The office is at the imposing National Telegraph Building on Calle Tacuba opposite the still more imposing Central Post Office.

Telephoning in Mexico is an adventure and an exasperation. It is complicated by the existence of two entirely separate systems, *Mexicana* and *Ericsson*, as has been mentioned. Your exasperation is faintly mitigated by the extreme modesty of the charges, local calls being ten or twenty centavos, long distance being only a small fraction of the charge for similar distances in the States. Get all the help you can from the smartest hotel telephone operator you can find. Then *wait*. And when you finally get your party and are promptly cut off try again and wait again. Patience will do it, in the end.

*English-language* publications are obvious chief aids to self-sufficiency. Among Mexico City's newspapers each of the two large dailies, called *Excelsior* and *El Universal*, has its page in English and each has good international news. The local columns and advertisements are likewise of practical interest. The smaller afternoon edition of *Excelsior* is called *Ultimas Noticias* and the newsboys rush through the streets with it, at frequent intervals, like so much flak to stop you in flight. On Sundays there is an afternoon paper called *Novedades* with good English-language columns. But newspaper Spanish is easy to pick up, if you took Latin in school and if you know a little French. It is easy anyway. Try it.

A *Daily Bulletin* in English is issued in Mexico City and distributed gratis in hotels, shops and cafés. It has condensed news, stock market reports, travel reports, entertainment

notes and—most inviting of all—many advertisements of things to buy and of places where one may eat, drink and be merry.

*This Week (Esta Semana)* is a free weekly encountered everywhere and is a truly valuable publication for the transient. Its subtitle *What to Do, What to See, Where and How* proclaims only a part of its usefulness for it contains also current time tables of airways, railways and bus lines, highway maps and city maps, fiesta and sports calendars, a shopping guide and information of a dozen other sorts about the capital and the chief cities. More than incidentally, its two-language articles and counsels provide a very serviceable “trot” to build up your Spanish the painless way. By all means pick up and use—to your own vast benefit—this ubiquitous fifty-page weekly. Who cares that it is a frank organ of the tourist trade with all the stops pulled out!

A propaganda magazine—but interesting for all that—is the monthly called *Modern Mexico*, published in New York (and distributed in Mexico) by the Mexican Chamber of Commerce of the United States. If it features personalities of the international and Hollywood sets it features also well-illustrated articles about Mexico itself and current travel attractions as they are developed or improved.

*Health precautions* are not of such overpowering interest in Mexico as in many other Latin lands but it is decidedly wise to avoid the drinking water in small towns and to avoid lettuce, uncooked vegetables and fruit that cannot be peeled. D. D. (diarrheic disturbance) from drinking water or from rashness in eating is experienced by many tourists. So far as water is concerned, worry may be routed by the simple and uncostly expedient of ordering Garci-Crespo table water (often called Tehuacán) or one of the popular brands of beer, Carta Blanca or the darker and stronger Moctezuma

XX. If you pronounce the latter "Dose Eckees" the waiter will at least know what you mean. So far as food is concerned, it should always be kept in mind that digestion is slower in high altitudes. It is, therefore, inadvisable to eat heavily in the evening or to exercise too strenuously after any hearty meal. If you have trouble, the omniscient Sanborn's will always recommend a good corrective.

*Smokes* are important to most travelers and it is pleasant to know that by present regulations substantial amounts of tobacco may be taken into Mexico. For example each smoker may take in one hundred cigars duty free. Or he may take five cartons—fifty packs—of his favorite American brand of cigarettes. Since these same cigarettes cost almost twice as much when purchased in Mexico, this particular item of advance knowledge is of solid interest to the budget. Some brands of Mexican cigarettes are smoked with some comfort by Americans but most of them seem rough. A suaver weed than most is the one called *Belmont* at fifty centavos a pack.

*Incidentals*—those little things of a big city that are the traditional budget-wreckers of travel—are really *little* in Mexico City, or they may be so if one watches them with half an eye. You will have noticed that the not-bad Mexican Belmonts just mentioned sell for a dime a pack; and it has been already stated that most local trolley and bus fares are two cents, a shoe shine (called *grasa*—for "grease") four cents. Similarly, a glass of orange juice (*jugo de naranja*) in many a little streetside stand is but two or three cents and a toasted roll (*mollete*) and coffee in good little Mexican cafés five cents. A clear-view gallery seat for almost any concert or ballet in the Palace of Fine Arts, perhaps the most sumptuous theatre in the whole world, is sixty cents. And *flowers* are almost given away in this land of flowers. Even in Xochimilco, which is one of the capital's chief tourist traps,

beautiful corsages of gardenias are twenty cents and gardenias with orchids forty cents. In the smart flower shops of the luxury hotels the prices soar like helicopters, but in the public markets where Mexicans "shop around," and where more and more Americans are finding vistas of fascination, the loveliest flowers cost so nearly nothing that one can hardly believe what one sees and hears. Inflation has not yet seemed to hit flowers (except in the hotels) and it is to be hoped that nature and the industrious gardeners will supply so many that this most typical of Mexico's attractions will remain the miracle it is today.

#### C. FIVE FOCI FOR AMERICANS

The index and the shopping guide at the beginning of *This Week* may serve almost as a directory of current addresses you will need in Mexico City, though it is somewhat harmed by the omission of certain important shops and restaurants which apparently have not chosen to advertise. Five special centers of interest for American travelers are of such outstanding importance that they may here constitute a practical directory of travel enhancement in Mexico City.

The *United States Embassy and Consulate* are in the same building at the corner of Avenida Insurgentes (named for the *Insurgents* of Father Hidalgo's time) and Calle Nizza. It is advisable from every angle, business, social and travel, for Americans to register here. Frequent social events, open to visiting Americans, are held at the embassy; and, of course, the consulate (the address is 105 Avenida Insurgentes) may be used as a mail address. This building is only a block distant from Hotel Genève.

The *Pemex Travel Club* and *Information Bureau*—to re-

peat this useful address from Chapter 2—is at Number 116 Calle Artículo 123.

The *Benjamin Franklin Library*, in a modernized colonial mansion at 34 Paseo Reforma, is one of the most cheerful and attractive retreats in the city. Dedicated in 1942 under the auspices of the Coordinator's Office, the State Department and the Library of Congress and directed by the former director of the New York Public Library, it is an institution in which every American may take pride. Its non-fiction books, especially those on Mexico, are of the most direct value to visitors and its current fiction shelves are appealing. The reading rooms, open to all, regardless of membership, are light and pleasant, as against the vast gloomy hall (formerly a church nave) in the Biblioteca Nacional. A membership card—with the privilege of taking out books—may be easily secured. A resident sponsor is required. Lectures and movies are offered gratis at regular intervals. The building, attractive in itself, is only five minutes' walk from Hotel Reforma.

The *American Club*, on the top floor of 31 Calle Bolívar, is a friendly rendezvous for Americans and its restaurant and sunshiny bar may be enjoyed by transients, regardless of membership. To reach it one walks through the courtyard and takes the elevator in the rear. Because of its inconspicuous entrance many short-time visitors never find it, but it is decidedly worth finding as a shrine of good talk.

The *American Book Store*, at 25 Avenida Madero, is an eddy of home interest, with the newspaper and magazine sections claiming first place. This lively store is two blocks from Sanborn's on the opposite side of the street.

## D. SHOPPERS IN PARADISE

Shoppers' ecstasy may develop into shoppers' fever in Mexico, D. F. One sees tourists so determined to spend their hundred dollars (keeping a weather eye out for the United States customs allowance for American residents returning home) that they plunge in and buy all sorts of dubious junk in the first two or three shops they encounter. The main artery of the capital is a siren to pent-up shopping lusts and to the pocketbook. It is wise to remember, however, that not only in the capital but also in provincial cities—especially Cuernavaca, Taxco, Puebla and Guadalajara—there are many shop windows that kindle the keen shopper's eye and set his or her arithmetic in motion. There are markets, too, and in some of them, including the small towns and villages on all the highways, wonderful bargains are to be had, for these places are not too aware of *turismo* and also they are still living in the age of barter. If sixty of one's intended hundred dollars are devoted to Mexico City shopping and if the remainder are devoted to the provinces and the more remote market towns, the proportion will work out about right for most people.

Leather work, bibelots in glass, pottery and lacquer, furniture, modern or antique, native costumes, curios and, of course, *silver*, are the main items of shopper-interest in Mexico. If you are to include Taxco in your itinerary—and Mexico without Taxco is hardly to be imagined—silver purchases should wait at least until you have seen the Taxco shops and the artisans at work in such celebrated establishments as those of Spratling and Los Castillo. Sarapes, being blankets worn casually and charmingly by Indians, invariably arouse interest and they are offered by roadside vendors at almost

every halt of every tourist trip but many a shop in the capital also offers dozens of them at reasonable prices. Remember, when you buy a sarape (or furniture or curios), that the more savagely-colored items are designed that way to *give us what we suppose to be Mexican*. Actually, Mexican colorings are not crudely bright or violent but artistically restrained. The Toltec and Aztec relics often offered to pyramid-trippers for a few cents the relic, strangely enough, are *genuine*, or so I am assured by Mexicans in a position to know, but such trinkets happen to leave me chilly and I never could induce myself to buy any even at *seven to the peso*, a price suggested to me by a vendor at the Acolman Monastery. I believe the Mexican government theoretically bans such sales of relics anyway and also the exporting of them, so we may as well escape the topic and return to livelier scenes. The Mexican capital's main street is perhaps the most exciting shopping street in the whole of Latin America. If it had one easily-pronounced name instead of two (Juárez and Madero) it would probably be more widely known than Cristobal's *Front Street*, Rio's *Ouvidor* or B. A.'s *Florida*.

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## CHAPTER VII

### *Tourists on a Willing Leash*

#### A. THE SIGHTSEERS' DOWNTOWN

DOWNTOWN, for the sightseer, the shopper, the pleasure-seeker, is a conveniently concentrated area. It means the dozen blocks from the Zócalo (with the cathedral, National Palace and National Museum) due west to the Caballito, which is the Little Horse. These terminal points are conspicuous in the pattern of Mexico. The Zócalo is officially named Plaza de la Constitución but no one ever calls it that. The origin of the popular name is variously explained. Some Mexican authorities believe that it is from the Arabian *zoc*, meaning market place, but the commonest explanation is that it means what it says in Spanish: socle. The socle of a proposed monument to Mexican independence is said to have been in ugly evidence here for years in the middle of the nineteenth century (it sounds strikingly plausible) so that ultimately the square took its nickname from the empty base. The monument was erected sixty years later on the Reforma boulevard but the word grew into the language of the people long before that. It has found its way to all parts of the republic and the central square of most Mexican cities and towns, including even Taxco and Acapulco, is popularly called Zócalo.

In this main and major Zócalo, Mexico took root. Here the Aztecs found the eagle and the snake. Here they built

their greatest teocalli and around it their capital city. From this area the celebrated Calendar Stone and many other great relics have been exhumed. Here Cortés founded the first Christian church and here was erected the first private residence of the conquerors' city. Before this clearing was a "Socle" it was a glittering bazaar called *Parian*. It was the first bull ring in the Americas and was the gruesome torture chamber of heretics whose souls were being rescued by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. It is the place where Mexican Independence was officially proclaimed and where Iturbide was crowned emperor. From Iturbide to Avila Camacho almost everything of national importance has happened, or has been celebrated, in this center of centers. Here each year, in a dramatic ceremony patriotism is rekindled by the re-enactment of Hidalgo's Grito de Dolores. It can almost be said that if you know the history of the Zócalo you know the whole history of Mexico.

Even the Caballito—at the other end of downtown—first pawed the air in the Zócalo. This equestrian statue of Charles IV was cast in 1802, from a design by Manuel Tolsa, director of sculpture in the city's Academy of San Carlos. At the time of the rebellion it was threatened with destruction because it represented Spain, the hotly hated oppressor. For protection it was concealed in a great blue globe of wood and later dragged off to an obscure part of the university cloister where it was all but forgotten. In 1852, it was remembered and set up in its present location at the downtown end of the Paseo Reforma. Mexicans still have no use for Charles IV or any other Bourbon monarch but they love their Little Horse, and they are rightly proud of it as a Mexican masterpiece. The horse and its incidental rider are widely acknowledged to be one of the finest equestrian statues ever made. Amid the strutting regiments of such "cav-

alry" in all parts of the world it stands out along with three others: the statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, that of Gattamelata by Donatello in Padua, and that of Colleoni by Donatello's pupil, Verrocchio, in Venice. It is amazing that a Spaniard of Mexico, an art director who has scarcely made the world's encyclopedias, should have achieved something in sculpture that ranks him with the giants.

#### B. THE AMERICAS' LARGEST CATHEDRAL

The Americas' largest cathedral is immensely impressive from the outside and equally disappointing inside. The façade, fronting on the open acres of the *Zócalo*, is a gray curtain of formidable masonry and stone traceries of prodigious width, totaling some 400 feet if one include not only the cathedral's own façade but the adjoining ones of the Chapel of St. Anthony and of the *Sagrario*, which means literally tabernacle or ciborium. The *Sagrario* is in the lavish churrigueresque style which one encounters everywhere in Mexico and which has been mentioned in Chapter 5. At its worst it is a mere cloying jumble. At its best, if one is in the mood for rich fare, it is theatrically pleasant and this example is one of Mexico's best. A motif often noticed in Mexican churrigueresque (more clearly in Taxco than elsewhere) is the symbol of the shell. This was considered a Christian symbol and it also represented Kukulcan (Quetzalcoatl), so the old and new religions were neatly spliced by a simultaneous tribute to both.

The interior of the cathedral (374 feet in depth) is disheartening, to me at least. The whole prodigious acreage is dreary and cluttered, and in saying this I do not refer to the very extensive strengthening of the foundation which is now going forward and which will add its dust and disorder

for years to come, since 25,000 tons of assorted material have to be removed. The nave, as in so many Spanish cathedrals, is virtually filled with the huge *coro* (choir), a priests affair exclusively, with massive gates always closed to shut out intruders, whether of the worshipping or sightseeing variety. I have often asked in Spain and in Spanish-America the reason for this "exclusiveness" and have never received a satisfying answer. It is maintained, they say, "for liturgical reasons," and one does indeed hear the priests droning their distant liturgies at almost any time of day; but the pious folk who wish merely to pray must seek what space is left, and the sightseers who wish merely to feast their eyes on the wealth of art concealed behind those gates and sacerdotal walls must guess at what is there. Fortunately, there are always plenty of side chapels available for the pious. One of them in Mexico's cathedral, Capilla del Santo Cristo, contains a crucifix which is thought by some investigators to be the very one that Cortés brought and set up. The stones and idols of the former *teocalli* were used in the first primitive structure and every excavation for new construction or repairs unearths new treasures.

The cathedral's treasures, together with those of the Sagrario, form a dazzling total in spite of all the depredations of the Rebellion, the Reform and the Revolution. Having complained of the cluttered interior I should hasten to emphasize the value of a careful survey under the guidance of an educated *cicerone*—but not with one of the dubious touts who cluster about the edifice and even inside it to importune the visitor at every turn. *Terry's Guide* devotes some twelve thousand words to it and the author is at his impressive best in such a congenial task. This cathedral is like a quicksand—but a pleasant one. Once planted in a study of it, however superficial one's intentions, one sinks deeper and

deeper. This is, after all, one of the most significant religious structures in the New World. Its importance in Mexico matches its size.

### C. TWO PALACES AND A MUSEUM

Two palaces and a museum capture the interest of even those who ordinarily sightsee only under protest. They are the National Palace, facing the Zócalo, the Palace of Fine Arts (*Bellas Artes*) adjoining the Alameda and the National Museum just off the Zócalo on Calle Moneda.

The National Palace has been mentioned as one of the conspicuous examples of construction in tezontle material. This building is as architecturally plain as can be but its long low lines are good colonial and it makes a striking and restful contrast to the overdressed churrigueresque of the nearby Sagrario. One of Moctezuma's palaces originally stood here, but Cortés, running true to form, replaced it with one of his own. This was bought from the Conqueror's descendants forty years later and transformed into the government palace. It has been rebuilt in whole or in part but much of the lower portion of the façade is a remnant of the Cortés original.

Dozens of salons are shown to the visitor, and, of course, the celebrated stairway murals by Rivera but the palace reaches its peak of interest only once a year, at midnight of September 15th. At that dramatic moment the president of the republic steps to the balcony, above which hangs the Liberty Bell, and personally utters "the Cry" (*el Grito*). This, as has been said, commemorates Hidalgo's original Grito de Dolores, shouted at the same day and hour in the year 1810, the cry that echoed for a decade until Independence actually came to Mexico. The Zócalo is packed with

tense thousands each year for this ceremony and the crowd takes up the president's cry, adding every noise it can think of, including the racket of innumerable firecrackers. Hundreds of church bells support the general bedlam and madness reigns. This is the Mexican counterpart of the coming of the New Year to Times Square and one must admit that Mexico's show is considerably more pointed than New York's.

The Palace of Fine Arts is a prodigious show piece but much more important to the culture of the nation it serves than are most such vanities. It contains a sumptuous opera house, a concert hall, a museum of popular arts, a gallery of paintings and several salons for current exhibitions of art works. Since the whole affair is operated by the state, some attractions, particularly lectures, are offered gratis, and everything, however grand and spectacular, is popularly priced. By climbing to the gallery (in an elevator) one may secure a seat for almost any performance of opera or ballet for sixty cents and the seat will be very comfortable. The view, though distant, will be unimpeded. Rivera and Orozco frescoes are great drawing cards of the art galleries in this building and one of Rivera's works is his own reproduction of the very one which Mr. Rockefeller refused for Rockefeller Center—but paid for in full.

President Díaz began the construction of this steel and marble mountain in 1904. The Revolution finally completed it but the cost in pesos was astronomical. When half done the whole thing sank crazily at one end, for all of Mexico City's foundation ground is no more than a mud pudding. Millions and more millions were spent to jack it up with concrete cradles and then the work went on. The whole interior was fashioned in the most luxurious style imaginable, with marbles of many colors and with magnificent

hardwoods and costly metals. It gives one the impression that some fabulous American billionaire must have conceived it and that when he went bankrupt the United States treasury took it over. The architect, it is said, gave his solemn and legal guarantee that the building would never sink again but whisperers whisper (to me for one) that it is sinking. One of them recently showed me some slabs of concrete paving beside the outer stairway at the Alameda end that have definitely sunk several inches below the general level, which is several feet below the original level. But one sincerely hopes that the structure will keep on a reasonably even keel. Among great buildings devoted to the arts it has scarcely a peer and it is justly the pride of modern Mexico.

From the travel angle this palace of art, music and drama is a wonderful enhancement of your visit and mine. The building is heated in winter—something to mention in Mexico—and splendidly air-conditioned at all seasons. You will drop in here frequently if only to get cool or warm and to see the works of art. In the portion which is an opera house you may see the best shows in the world and hear the best concerts. The Tiffany curtain of spun glass, concealing the stage, is world famous. One hears of it in advance, almost to the point of weariness, yet it does not disappoint. It depicts a scene featuring snow-crowned Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl, and clever lighting effects bring sunset, moonlight and finally a pink dawn to the two peaks.

The National Museum, directly behind the National Palace, is housed in the building which was formerly the mint. This building is by no means adequate to the immense collections, which are tumbled about in jumbled profusion. Sometime Mexico will have a new museum worthy of the incomparable treasures of aboriginal races which it has to display. Emperor Maximilian founded the present one and

until recent years numerous relics of his pathetic self and of Carlotta were seen in an inner suite; but these gewgaws, which are of very minor interest compared with the stone wonders dating from Maya, Toltec and Aztec times, have been removed and are displayed in Chapultepec Castle. Perhaps the greatest single item of the museum is the 25-ton disk of basaltic porphyry which faces the main entrance. It is the priceless Calendar Stone of the Aztecs and is not only a work of art but a marvel of astronomical science. It is twelve feet in diameter and three feet in thickness. Prescott gave credence to Indian stories that the stone, originally weighing fifty tons, was transported by the Aztecs from a quarry several hundred miles distant; but even if the story grew in the telling its own message of a science patiently developed by generations of "untutored" folk is one which would be utterly unbelievable if it were oral instead of lithic. The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome never produced an astronomical table the equal in accuracy of that displayed by this stone.

Other prized possessions of the National Museum are the large statues of Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli. The former deity, Lord of the Morning Star, was definitely benign, but the latter, being chief of the Aztec gods, was perhaps the bloodiest and cruelest fanatic ever imagined by human worshippers. In reading the authentic accounts of the human sacrifices demanded by Huitzilopochtli one wonders that man could ever have conceived so horrible a system or that priests could have put it into practice. The Sacrificial Stone in the museum makes it all too real, for we see the very cavity into which the victims' hearts were tossed, still warm and almost beating, after they had been torn out of living men, women and even small children in the name of religion; and one sees the "scupper" from which the blood



flowed off in a steady trickle. The victims were often captives of war but if these were not adequate to satisfy the god's lusty appetite, children were bought from poverty-stricken parents who were intimidated by the priests. The children were decked out in fine robes and flowers as they were led weeping through holiday crowds of spectators. Tears were a good augury and the priests were elated when there was a copious flow from childish eyes. In the case of war captives it was considered desirable to torture the victim at length and with all the ingenuity that could be devised. And after the heart had been finally torn out, the body was given to the Aztec who had captured him. It was then cooked, elaborately seasoned and served as the chef-d'œuvre of a dinner to which the proud host invited his neighbors, both men and women. Hospitality was competitive and at great dinners several roasted warriors were needed to grace a proper table. I think I have said enough but it is only a tithe of the "whole truth" suggested by the Sacrificial Stone. One's admiration grows for the bravery of the Spaniards, not without practice in their own type of cruelties, who faced these horrors in a seemingly hopeless war of conquest.

#### D. THE CASTLE OF GRASSHOPPER HILL

The castle of Chapultepec, which name means Grasshopper Hill, is the symbol of the sightseers' Mexico, though it is also much more than that. The Aztecs had a temple on the eminence and they used the copious springs at its base for their main water supply. Cortés planned a fortress here and a later viceroy built one, but it was demolished by the United States forces which attacked it in 1847 under Gen-

eral Gideon Pillow. Some two decades later Chapultepec was invaded by the busy architects and builders of Maximilian and Carlotta, who made it their residence, and that is why this castle's salons and boudoirs now look like those of a French château. It was Carlotta who ordered the building of the two-mile Paseo (later to be called Reforma) to connect the downtown area with the imperial residence. It leads straight as a die from the Little Horse to the Hill. Since the brief period of empire this castle has been the White House of Mexican presidents, but Cárdenas, the super-democrat, refused to live in it and converted it into a museum. Avila Camacho has followed his precedent, keeping to his own more modest home.

The forest of Chapultepec, surrounding the castle and lending glamour to this whole section of the capital, is one of the great and greatly romantic park-forests of the world, quite comparable in stateliness to the Bois de Boulogne and to Brussels' Bois de Cambre, with its tall beech sentinels. Mexico City's forest is distinguished by tall cedars which are arboreal cousins of the coast redwoods of California. Their name, in Aztec, is *ahuehuatl* (colloquially *ahuehuete*), meaning "Old-Man-by-the-River," and beneath their giant branches, among the statues and fountains of the park, students pace back and forth, studying vocally for their examinations. If the student has no examination, or doesn't care about it anyway, he has a girl instead of a book, and the two of them presently have a bench to themselves.

Americans who find a little monument in the woods close to the base of the rock, at its steepest front, may be sobered by the inscription which they read, for it proves an old truth, that there are at least two ways of looking at anything. The inscription on this monument reads: 13 Sept.

1847. *A la Memoria de los Alumnos del Colegio Militar que Murieran como Heroes* [died like heroes] *en la INVASION NORTEAMERICANA*. The names of the six victims of our "invasion" follow. These men were defenders of the hill and when their position became untenable they wrapped themselves in Mexican flags and leaped from the parapet to death on the rocks below. This act had nothing of the Japanese spirit of hara-kiri but much of the Latin spirit of drama, which, to colder, northern eyes, might seem melodrama. At any rate it showed how Mexicans regarded their "good neighbor" a century ago.

If you would see Chapultepec, both castle and park, as Mexicans see it, go there by bus (marked *Lomas de Chapultepec*, on Paseo Reforma), preferably crowding aboard a packed second-class one—the first-class ones will be *completo* anyway—and roll to the base of the conspicuous hill. From there take a local bus marked *Servicio al Castillo* which takes you up and finally back for ten centavos. All Mexico is there having fun and you are reminded of the Parc du Luxembourg or the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris. It is the very opposite of exclusive but you have not come to be "that way," and you can take pleasure in being part of a huge noisy picnic. The *charros* and *charras*, in glittering costumes, will be prancing showily on their beautiful horses and the brass band will be braying. The ponds will be full of boats and the boats will be full of very humble people, so happy that they are ready to cackle with laughter at anything or nothing. Let the fashionables roll by you in their snobbish Cadillacs and "Bweeks" and if they glance your way with lofty condescension, so much the better. You have achieved something paradoxical, since you, a foreigner, are far more authentically Mexican at the moment than are they.

## E. THE LUXURY SECTOR

The residential avenidas, as the motor sees them, form a very attractive pattern of luxury in the southwestern part of the city. The central shaft of the pattern is unquestionably the Paseo Reforma. Extensive areas, recently developed, are models of loveliness and of artistic city planning. Architectural styles are varied, one of the popular ones being that borrowed from Mexico by California and returned to its place of origin under the name "Californian." The effect of the gleaming white plaster with elaborately carved gray stone as trim is undeniably entrancing in the Mexican sunshine. Trim streets are interspersed with tasteful plazas, whose fountains and clear pools make the ensemble seem like an exposition presented by a planning board for public inspection. One of the avenues in one of these developments bears the name Campos Eliseos, which one recognizes as the Spanish equivalent of Champs Elysées.

The wealth of this capital city is impressive as one rolls through mile after mile of fine avenues lined on both sides with the mansions of the rich. But also it is clear that the city manages to support a middle class, despite the squeeze of low salaries and high costs of keeping up appearances, for there are many attractive *colonias* obviously inhabited by young, ambitious families, whose heads are hard-working business and professional men. Perhaps these thoroughly attractive but not showy suburbs represent the best evidence of young Mexico's progress along the hard road from Independence to freedom.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### *Strolls Without a Chaperon*

#### A. TEZONTLE PALACES OF OLD

MEXICO CITY is the only capital in the New World—save to some extent Quito, Ecuador—which lends itself to unguided strolling as a supplement to the established tours. The downtown area, that of Aztec Tenochtitlán and of the colonial capital of Nueva España, is not of great extent and the extra rewards of random walks are certain and numerous. No guided tour can possibly do more than brush the surface of this city's wealth in romance. One is reminded of the old quarters of Paris, Rome, Venice, where palaces and churches are so thick that they jump into view unbidden in almost any street or *ruelle* or *rioteria*—which last, by the way, is a Venetian earth-river or filled-in canal exactly similar to many an earth-river in this very city. The old palaces of the Mexican capital have, however, a special and unique appeal because of the material—tezontle—from which virtually all of them are built.

Tezontle is a type of lava rock, almost as porous as tufa and consequently of a wonderfully soft appearance, though rough to the touch. It is durable but very light in weight, making it ideal for a city that rests on mud. The color is not a natural mineral color but a stain which was much esteemed by the Spanish colonials and which has been continued for romantic and artistic reasons by the moderns. I

have called it murky rose but it cannot be neatly described in words and, moreover, it has a substantial range, varying from subdued pink to Burgundy, to maroon, and sometimes even to a dull purple. Always there is the murky or smoky tinge to it, which is not mere grime, though the weathering process and the assorted dusts, dirt and smokes of centuries darken it as they darken any material in any great city. It is, however, of smoky appearance when seen in fresh blocks in new construction. I do not know quite how it escapes being sombre but it definitely does escape, and by a generous margin. Tezontle is cheerful and appealing. Perhaps the gray stone work, with its intricate carvings, saves it. In colonial times it was brightened by a creamy white trim for doors and windows, and in modern structures it is sometimes dramatized by contrasting white plaster.

Among the old *palacios* and *casas* constructed of tezontle—and most of them are within a half mile of the Zócalo—a very few have remained as public buildings or have been taken over by business. The great majority of them are mere *vecindades* (tenements), inhabited in many cases by the poorest of the poor. Families with even a trace of means prefer less romance and more plumbing. Among the *palacios* still relatively intact three may be easily found by the stroller, not to mention the Hotel de Cortés (see Chapter 6) in which one may actually live.

The *Nacional Monte de Piedad*, facing the Zócalo just west of the cathedral, is the most conspicuous. In its modern capacity as the National Pawn Shop, this calls for a special visit when in bargain-hunting mood, but the outside of the structure provides a good sample of colonial tezontle. This was the first viceregal residence and it is on the site of the "old houses" of Moctezuma, as a little plaque in the wall

announces. (*Aquí Estuvieron Las Casas Viejas De Moctezuma Hasta 1521.*)

The *Palacio de Iturbide* is quite as handy, though less visible because of the narrowness of the main thoroughfare on which it fronts. It is at 17 Avenida Madero, almost opposite Hotel Ritz. Iturbide did not build this luxurious palace. It was built at the demand of an enormously rich and frivolous countess of the eighteenth century, the Condesa de San Mateo Valparaíso, and was acquired by Iturbide as his imperial residence in 1821. From 1855 to 1928 it was a fashionable hotel, used often for diplomatic guests and other celebrities. It was the center of capital life of the showier sort, until replaced by hotels of the modern style. Today it is occupied by numerous business concerns, including *El Tesoro*, a glittering mart for tourist shoppers who like good souvenirs of Mexico "and hang the expense." It may be noted in passing that the same wealthy Countess of Valparaíso owned the splendid baroque palace now occupied by the National Bank of Mexico on the nearby corner of the streets named for Isabel the Catholic and President Carranza.

The *Casa del Conde de Santiago de Calimaya* is easily the most exciting of the three tezontle palaces here brought to the reader's attention and it is the least visited because it is less easily found than the others; but it is near the Zócalo and richly worth finding. Walk from the southeast corner of the great square three blocks down Calle Piño Suárez and there it is at the corner of Avenida República del Salvador. It was erected by the first Count of Calimaya, who was a cousin of Cortés and who thus had access to any Aztec treasures which he might desire. A large stone tiger of somewhat insipid countenance, probably from the chief teocalli itself, is the building's cornerstone. There is much de-

tail of carved stone and woodwork to study with admiration in this superb old palace and one may knock about the patio without interference from anyone. The building's tezontle façade is an added attraction, for it is pinker and warmer than most.

Almost anywhere in the very old sector of the city palace-hovels of great interest are to be seen. Look for them, for instance, on Calle República de Chile, on Calle San Ildefonso, on Calle Tacuba and especially on Calle Donceles on the side opposite the Iris theatre.

#### B. CHURCHES STRAIGHT AND TIPSY

The churches of Old Mexico City are even more numerous than old palaces and like them they rest on the mud blanket which was the former bed of Lake Texcoco. The majority, both of churches and palaces, have settled several inches into the mud, or in many cases several feet, causing considerable irregularity and tipsiness, but this shows up more in the churches because they are usually higher and most of them have domes and towers. Three churches call for special finding by the stroller since none of them is so obvious as to be unmissable.

*Nuestra Señora de Loreto*, facing the like-named *plazuela* off Calle San Ildefonso (the continuation eastward of Calle Cuba) is the tipsiest of all and is worth finding chiefly for that reason. It is nearly or quite as far out of plumb as the Leaning Tower of Pisa and as one stands in the tiny square gazing at it, and particularly at the huge dome which tops it like an ill-fitting bowler hat, one almost expects to be a witness to its collapse, now a century and a half overdue. Manuel Tolsa, he who did the Caballito, built this odd church for the Jesuits, who wanted it in order to house a



Loreto Madonna brought from Italy. To enter it one must descend several steps to a level four feet below the square and then mount several steps to the present floor. It is worth the risk—which is none at all unless a violent earthquake should occur while you are in it.

*La Santísima Trinidad* church can be seen a few blocks to the east from the entrance to the National Museum. It is on the corner of Calles Moneda and Academia. The Santísima—as it is commonly called—has one of the few notable churrigueresque façades of the capital's churches and its side walls are of very ancient looking tezontle. Its glazed tile dome and its exceedingly off-plumb tower combine with the florid façade and the red lava-stone to make this church a combination of all that is Mexican.

*Santo Domingo*, one of the fine baroque churches of the city, is on the Plaza de la Corregidora (formerly Plazuela de Santo Domingo) three blocks north of the Zócalo as one walks up Calle Brasil (past the Monte de Piedad). The very charming square of the mayor's lady is a logical center for "left bank" wanderings (see later section of this chapter), but the church is a sight in itself, regardless of the square. It is a great remainder of the much greater monastery and central headquarters of the Dominicans in New Spain. This was the very wealthy order which operated the Inquisition and its main church is supposed to have cost \$200,000, a fantastic sum for the year 1736 when it was completed and dedicated. The interior contains some fine churrigueresque which has survived all the anti-clerical efforts of the Reform and the Revolution. The outside is dilapidated, like most old structures in this quarter, but it is still immensely impressive and, unlike most of the churches, it can be adequately seen, for the square in front of it is a long one and gives a fine vantage point for study of its enormous dome

and its tall *campanario*.

The composition of this bell tower (whose famous original bells were removed at the time of the Reform) is worth setting into words, layer upon layer, though words are clumsy in dealing with such a soaring structure. There is a large clock on the plaza side of it at a level of perhaps thirty feet. Above the clock are three bells hanging in a vertical row. Above the bells comes a stretch of yellow tile work and then a bell chamber with a larger bell. The eye climbs up with the tower to behold a small cupola with more yellow tile work and, oddly enough, above this a tiled roof sloping up steeply to the absolute pinnacle, which is a cross against Mexico's blue heaven.

One need never take the churches of this city too seriously. No overpowering masterpiece will be overlooked if you miss them all but they are an interesting company and the ones named above are but three picked almost at random from the multitude. Their struggle to remain standing in the ooze which was once a reedy lagoon or at best an insecure group of low islands gives one a sense as of wishing to help hold them up. However, they all survived a considerable earthquake as recently as 1944 so they may reasonably look forward to a still riper and older age.

### C. THREE MARVELS FOR DISCOVERY

If the mood for unchaperoned strolls remains the visitor may find various marvels of this historic city which are seldom seen by tourists since they are not included on the fixed city tours nor on most special church-and-palace tours. Leaving for a later chapter the great structures whose walls are covered with the work of the Mexican painters we may run down three unsung marvels of earliest days, though

there are perhaps three dozen available for exhaustive searchers.

The *Hospital de Jesús Nazareno*, at the corner of Piño Suárez and Salvador, diagonally across from the house of the Count of Santiago (with the Aztec tiger cornerstone), is the oldest hospital in all the Americas. It could hardly be less than the oldest for it was founded by Cortés himself "on the famous site of paganism known as *Huitzillan* in the year 1527," as an inscription states. An endowment left by the Conqueror keeps the place up as a hospital and this in spite of numerous attempts, some by the government itself, to break the will. Huitzillan was the place where Cortés and Moctezuma first met, the former dismounting from his horse, the latter stepping down from his sumptuous litter. In the church of Jesús Nazareno, which adjoins the hospital, the remains of the Conqueror lay for some thirty years, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, after which they were lost to posterity though some students assert that they are still there. This city corner is altogether redolent of history, almost like the Zócalo.

A pronunciation note may obtrude here to roil thoughts of history. The tourist who inquires for the "Hospital of Jesus" will evoke the blankest of looks from almost any Mexican for it will not occur even to the average well-educated one that Jesus has any connection with "Haysóos."

*Las Vizcaínas* ("The Basques," a popular name universally used instead of the official one Colegio de la Paz) is a former schools for girls founded by three rich and philanthropic Basques in the eighteenth century. It is of enormous proportions, having a frontage on the Calle and the Plaza of Vizcaínas (just east of the broad Calle San Juan de Letrán) of about 500 feet. Its area, in case you like big figures, is well over five acres. There is little to see in the huge central

court or the various smaller patios but the whole rambling ensemble is indeed a marvel of Mexico. In many portions the *colegio* has sunk crazily into the spongy soil and this adds immeasurable charm to the picture. One forgets the neighborhood, which today is one of the most sordid in the city.

*Fuente del Salto de Agua*, two blocks south of Las Vizcaínas, is a fountain as attractive as its name (Water Leap). If it had as its motif a maternal wolf or a Neptune instead of twining snake columns one could imagine it to be one of the fountains of Rome. The interesting chapel near it is popularly called by the name of the fountain.

#### D. WANDERING ON THE "LEFT BANK"

Mexico City is one of innumerable cities ambitiously called by its boosters the Paris of its country or continent or hemisphere. The tag is less far-fetched than usual and so far as it applies to this capital it applies also to the student sector, or Latin Quarter, or Left Bank. There is no river at all but the atmosphere of the university sector is strikingly suggestive, in a smaller and less glamorous way it must be freely admitted and certainly without the bright cafés of the Boul' Mich' or Montparnasse, of the beloved *quartier* of generations of students and Bohemians.

One really feels something of the Left Bank in the Plaza de la Corregidora and its radiating streets. The dour lady patriot sits in the middle of the plaza in bronze, looking august and a bit cross but no doubt hatching new plots by the minute to get rid of the hated Spaniards. One may find a bench near the Mayoress, call a boy for a *grasa* (but he will be there at one's feet anyway, getting out his polishing paraphernalia), and let life unfold. Across the way is the

University's *Escuela Nacional de Medicina*, affectionately called by the students *Casa Chata* (Flat-nosed) because of its snubbed or rounded front.

Three centuries and more of tortuous history, sometimes "torturous" as well, roll from this snub-nosed structure or from the site of it. A part of the rambling Dominican convent first stood here but it was wiped out in 1716 by an inundation of Lake Texcoco, which was not then by any means the mere memory it is today. Then rose this present building to house the *Tribunal del Santo Oficio*, which was the Holy Office of the Inquisition, under Dominican auspices as in Spain. Tomás de Torquemada's contribution to civilization had already functioned for a century and a half in Mexico (two and a half in Spain) and required a building worthy of its importance and sanctity. One need not dwell at length on the horrible burnings alive—or the mere strangulation when the heretic's offense was slight. The stranglings took place on a corner of the *Zócalo* but the burnings occurred regularly in the *Plaza del Quemadero* (Burning Place), a stone platform in what is now the Alameda, the fate of the victims having been previously determined in the Tribunal. The awful cloud passed with the torture and trial of the patriot hero José María Morelos, who was the Inquisition's last victim in Mexico. The Holy Office, after applying the torture preliminary to his removal by the viceroy to be shot, declared him "an unconfessed heretic, an abetter of heretics, a disturber of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a profaner of the holy sacraments, a traitor to God, to the King and to the Pope." Morelos, a sincere country priest, was none of these things except a disturber of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. That one may be sure he was, for the hierarchy relished nothing so little as a disturbance of its privileged status.

The building which La Corregidora faces, and which we face while the boy finishes the *grasa*, advanced to worthier uses with the coming of Independence to Mexico and with the passing of the Dominicans. Manuel Acuña, the celebrated and so-Latin writer of *Pasionarias* (perfeverid love poems), worked here and died here in 1873. He did, in fact, follow the line of his own poetry a bit too literally and took poison in this very building because a love affair had gone wrong. Thousands of Mexicans, who know his poems by heart, revere him all the more because he died, as one might almost say, in the line of duty. The whole Left Bank is still romanticized by that famous suicide.

The Square of La Corregidora has much more than a university building to suggest Left Bank activities. It has interesting bookstores and art shops, with old prints and maps of Mexico, suggesting dimly the bookstalls along the Seine embankment. It has medical supply shops and general student supply shops and several curious old-fashioned printing presses which operate busily on the sidewalks. It has passing students too—lots of them at certain hours.

A special touch, not of the Left Bank but of Indian Mexico, is the row of *evangelistas* under the *portales* (arcades) at the west side. These are public letter writers and each is seated expectantly behind his ancient Underwood or dilapidated Oliver (I saw no Royals, Remingtons or Coronas but cannot explain the lack), ready to "take a letter" at the request of any timid Aztec or worried Toltec. He will undoubtedly touch up the letter gratis, inserting a bit of romantic fire here, if the love-making is too tame, weaving in some impressive legal phrases there if it is a clumsy and amateurish business communication. These evangelistas look to us decidedly seedy, like garret poets who have tasted the dregs of disillusion, but to illiterate Indians they must look

like gods. They sit there behind those mysterious instruments, play them like little marimbas and produce funny marks on paper, marks that will mean what the Indian has just said, marks that can be understood by a person who is not even within sight or hearing. If it is a love letter the chances are that these strange marks will have to be set into spoken words at the receiving end by some learned person, for the addressee will not know what they mean. But, of course, Crisóstomo or José might know if either of them is home from his studies at the *colegio*. It is all very wonderful. Compared with this the miracle of the radio is nothing. One hears that tiresome box blatting away in every village plaza, and that after all is mere talking and singing and playing—but words from a machine!

The Indians have a tiny *templo* of their own in the square close to the *portales* of the *evangelistas*. Mr. Terry warns us of this shrine with such agitation that he splits an infinitive for the only time, so far as I am aware, in the half million words of his guide. He warns us not to enter the church of these Indians since "the visitor is apt to unwittingly carry away minute entomological specimens which rightfully belong to them." I risked contamination, however, and was able to retreat quite safely.

The Left Bank is by no means limited to the area of the Square of the Mayoress. It spreads along the north-south streets of Chile, Brazil and Argentina and the east-west streets of Cuba (San Ildefonso), Donceles and Tacuba. The last named is a street of bookstores and print stores, especially in the block directly back of the cathedral and at the corner of Argentina. At this latter corner, overlooking some excavations of the Aztec city, are open-air exhibits of world maps on a large scale. The Left Bank is not something to

"do" in a hasty walk. It is something to experience in various unplanned visits as convenience or mood directs.

#### E. BARGAINS IN THE MOUNT OF PIETY

Mexico's Nacional Monte de Piedad is an insistent magnet to such travelers as discover it for the place is always seething with human interest, and sometimes good bargains, even spectacular bargains, are to be found. The odd name originated in Italy as *Monte di Pietà* and was established at Rome early in the 1500's by Pope Leo X, who was a son of Lorenzo de' Medici. The three gold balls of the pawnbroker are from the heraldic arms of the Medici family. The purpose of the Mount of Piety as a municipal or national institution is always in theory, and generally in practice, to save the poor from being mercilessly squeezed by usurers. A charitable paternalism was the honest purpose of the first example in Rome and the admirable idea spread gradually to France (*Mont de Piété*), Spain and the Spanish New World. Mount means bank (compare *monte* in certain card games) and refers to a public or government loan. Piété or Piedad originally meant pity, or charity, rather than piety; so Bank of Pity makes etymological sense after all.

One recalls that the institution has been abused in some cases, notably the famous *Affaire Stavisky* in France, where very seamy operations at the Mont de Piété in Bayonne were uncovered; but the average has been excellent and Mexico City's Monte de Piedad (there are others in Puebla, Guadalajara and so forth) is an excellent example. It was founded in 1775 by the Count of Regla, a philanthropic mine owner, and has been administered by the Republic as a charity. The rich, however, seek it as much as the poor, to judge by the jewelry and fancy bibelots which are mixed with the junk.



A relatively low rate of interest is charged and ninety per cent of the articles are said to be redeemed. But since some fifty thousand separate articles, ranging from grand pianos to pocket knives, are often pawned in a single month the ten percent residue provides a very substantial average of potential bargains.

Frequent auctions (*remates*) of unredeemed items are held at times announced by signs in the building but these are avidly attended by keen-eyed professionals and the alien visitor may prefer to avoid such competition and roam at will, on an uncrowded day, looking for bargains under the glass cases of the main hall and in the various smaller rooms. These display rugs, antiques, optical instruments, musical instruments, books and so on, almost without end, though there are no pigs or parrots. Everything in the hall and in the lesser rooms is plainly ticketed as to price and no bargaining is possible except in the competitive *remates*.

The hours of admission, which seem to change with astonishing frequency, are at present 10:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. The hall, marked *Almonte*, is at the right as one enters from the Zócalo. This is the general sales room for jewelry, watches and other small items. The range of these, in value and price, is enormous, running from half a peso to at least 55,000 pesos (\$11,000), for I saw a diamond bracelet with the latter price mark. The items are no less interesting for their imagined history than for themselves. I noticed, for instance, a gold and enamel pin marked "Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey—10 years," and it was priced, so to speak, at a peso a year, for the tag read ten pesos. What unfortunate American, I wondered, was stuck in Mexico to such extent that he had to let this go for the four or five pesos he presumably received for it? Or did some Mexican *ladrón*

in a dubious bar lift it to turn it in for whatever he could get?

I have a good friend, a resident of Mexico City, who once picked up a beautiful gold watch in the Monte de Piedad, with the impressive words *Cartier—Paris* on its face, for the nominal sum of 150 pesos; but my own shopping there was decidedly less successful, not to say less smart. Once when I was in the city a valued fountain pen with my name engraved on a gold band around it, was lost or stolen. I was particularly unhappy because it matched an equally valued pencil which I still retained. A few days later I saw a pen precisely like mine in the Monte de Piedad. I examined the gold band through a magnifying glass but could not see any trace of my name. At any rate it was its twin and it wrote well for me. It was priced at seven dollars but thinking this enough and too much for a second-hand pen that might have been used for years I told the pawn clerk I would think it over. I did think it over and went back next day to buy it. "*Vendado*" she announced briskly, pointing to the blank area in the showcase where it had been. I was too late and I have always regretted that I sought to appease the goddess *Frugalitas*. You will be wiser when you see something you really want.

#### F. MARKETS FOR THE MYRIADS

Markets are among the brightest pigments in the metaphorical sarape that is Mexico. The fascination of them never palls and most Americans—especially American women—who visit one of them once in Mexico City will go again and again. Between times they will decry the smells and the confusion of them, for every type of merchandise is offered along with edibles, but they know in their hearts that their

fastidious instincts will yield to the stronger instincts of trading and of watching the very heartbeat of life. "That is fancy talk," says someone. But wait until you see a Mexican market in full swing.

Prices will seem very moderate. You will recall, however, that no trader in any market expects ever to get the price asked. Do not insult him or her by paying promptly the figure first mentioned. The very least you can do with propriety is to hesitate, look dismayed and murmur "*Muy caro*" several times. It is more self-respecting to chaffer for a few minutes, if you can muster enough Spanish to do it. If not, just clothe yourself with the right amount of dudgeon and let the market man beat himself down—though not too far, for he needs your money more than you need his merchandise.

In a village market in the south of Mexico I once bought a little lava dinner bell in the form of a peasant woman wearing a long skirt. It rang nicely and pleased my shopping sense. I asked the price, expecting that it would be one or two pesos. To my astonishment the woman said "*Veinte-cinco centavos*" (twenty-five centavos, being five cents). I hastily bought it, feeling much pleased with myself. At another stand I tried some bargaining on another similar bell and was elated at my shrewdness in securing it for eight centavos. The woman gave me two tiny coppers of one centavo each in change from a ten centavo piece. Later I showed off the bells at my hotel and found that a real trader had secured precisely similar bells at *three* centavos apiece. My ego was deflated, but remembering the pitiful poverty of the old woman who had sold me one of the bells at a penny and three-fifths (in American money) I was not too sorry.

The *Mercado Abelardo L. Rodríguez*, two or three blocks north of the tiny Loreto Church, is the largest market in

Mexico City and is even called the largest in the world, but those who recall *les halles* of Paris will not accept that claim. It is, at any rate, huge and chromatically exciting. Sunday morning is the best time to see this or any market of the capital, but all of them do business every day.

The *San Juan Market* is far handier, and also more colorful since it includes Mexico City's Chinatown and a glorious "block of flowers." Walk south on Calle Dolores, entering that street from Avenida Juárez at the eastern end of the Alameda, and you will soon be in the heart of it. Roses of many colors, gladioli, marigolds, lilies, orchids are only a few of the flowers deployed in this street and in a tiny *plazuela* beyond. The massive fragrance of the roses fairly saturates the air. Fruits of every imaginable hue (including all those of tezontle), vegetables, herbs, articles of native craftsmanship in various materials—the endless piles of wares are pleasantly staggering to the senses.

*La Merced* is a very large and very humble market centering one block south and four blocks east of the Zócalo. Life is very raw and throbbing hereabouts. I have found it difficult to thread my way on foot through Calle Jesús María, over which la Merced spills copiously, and all but impossible to get through the same street by taxi.

*Lagunilla*, six blocks north of Madero on Calle Isabel la Católica (whose name changes to Chile) is more a bazaar than a market for it is devoted chiefly to textiles and especially to silks. Costumes of the style called China Poblana, which has become the national feminine costume of Mexico, are much in evidence, but the strange story of the "Puebla China-girl" belongs to the city of Puebla (and in some degree to Acapulco where the *China* landed) and perhaps you would rather not purchase her costume until you reach her city.

Almost any populous street in the downtown part of the capital is a market of sorts and you need not hunt up one of the named markets to find things being sold in the open. The whole western sidewalk bordering the Zócalo is a merchandise mart at all times. Before Christmas and before the *Fiesta de los Reyes* (Festival of the Three Magi; January 6th) the booths and piles of toys and merchandise spread frankly into the plaza, to the great annoyance of bus and taxi drivers. The broad sidewalk of the Calle San Juan de Letrán is another unofficial market.

Calendars seem to sprout from the sidewalks of almost every street, especially at Christmas and in the early months of the year. They are huge pictorial affairs, often displaying pretty girls and most often *Japanese* pretty girls who are cycling or playing unconvincing tennis in extremely diaphanous costumes. Some enterprising merchant must have imported a shipload of these gaudy Oriental prints years ago for they are hardy perennials of Mexico's street markets. One turns with relief to the living Mexican girls who are on every hand, neat little creatures of aboriginal blood and aboriginal grace.

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## CHAPTER IX

### *The Spectrum of Mexican Art*

#### A. THE CLASSICS OF SAN CARLOS

MEXICO's major collection of old paintings, from both European and native artists, is that in the gloomy old building originally called *Academia de los Nobles Artes de San Carlos de la Nueva España*, whose entrance is at 22 Calle Academia, one block east of the National Museum. These classics include good examples of Murillo, Rubens, Zurbarán and one or two each of Titian, Velázquez, Goya and El Greco; and of the Mexican school there are several by the elder Baltazar de Echave and one colossal affair, the Virgin of the Apocalypse, by the celebrated Indian, Miguel Cabrera.

The authorities who now administer this picture gallery as a part of the National School of Fine Arts do not make it an easy or attractive business for the traveler to see the treasured paintings. The building is depressingly dilapidated and there is no sign whatever on it to indicate that it houses an art collection, nor to indicate the hours of admission. On my third try I knew I had the hours right (10:00 to 1:00, except Sunday) and I was able to enter the building all right, but the place was as silent as a mausoleum. Presently I heard the click of a typewriter, presumably that of Charon's secretary clicking off the latest passenger list for the Styx ferry. I followed the sound upstairs to the *Biblioteca* and entered that august hall to inquire how I could see

the paintings. "Go to the other end of the corridor and knock," said the harried typist, who proved to be a young man making a catalog. "Nothing may happen for a while but just keep on knocking." I followed instructions and sure enough nothing happened. At long last a disheveled guard appeared and said rather sharply, "Not open until ten." Before he could shut the door in my face I whipped out my watch and showed him that it was then 10:15. He gazed ill-humoredly at the timepiece and was thinking up some other reason to refuse me admittance when I broke in firmly, "Please. This is my third try." A half peso, not very subtly pressed into his hand, won him over and his humor rapidly improved. He even showed me the pictures himself and developed a gradual pride in so doing for the collection is important. But he spoiled my contemplation of these masterpieces by rushing me along far too fast, as virtually all museum attendants do in every city in the world.

#### B. RIVERA GIVES LESSONS IN HISTORY

The mighty moderns of Mexico have attracted world-wide attention during the last quarter century, somewhat to the astonishment of Mexicans themselves. Basically, these men, starting with Diego Rivera, have done something new in the field of art. They have used their talents, not as followers of a remote muse untouched by the practical problems of life, but to advance, in open and unblushing propaganda, the theories in which they passionately believe, or have believed until success and the passage of time have slightly blunted their evangelism. These men are part and parcel of the Revolution. In the early twenties, when the "Mexican School" took form, the artists were outright communists in their sympathies and in their practices. Rivera was one of the leading

spirits in organizing the famous "Syndicate of Painters, Sculptors and Intellectual Workers." This fostered a cooperative shop to aid aspiring beginners and to distribute the work of seasoned members. It held earnest and thunderous meetings to denounce capitalism, bourgeois pursuits and traditional academic patterns of art. It published a very red newspaper called *El Machete*, which Rivera himself edited, in cooperation with Siqueiros and Guerrero.

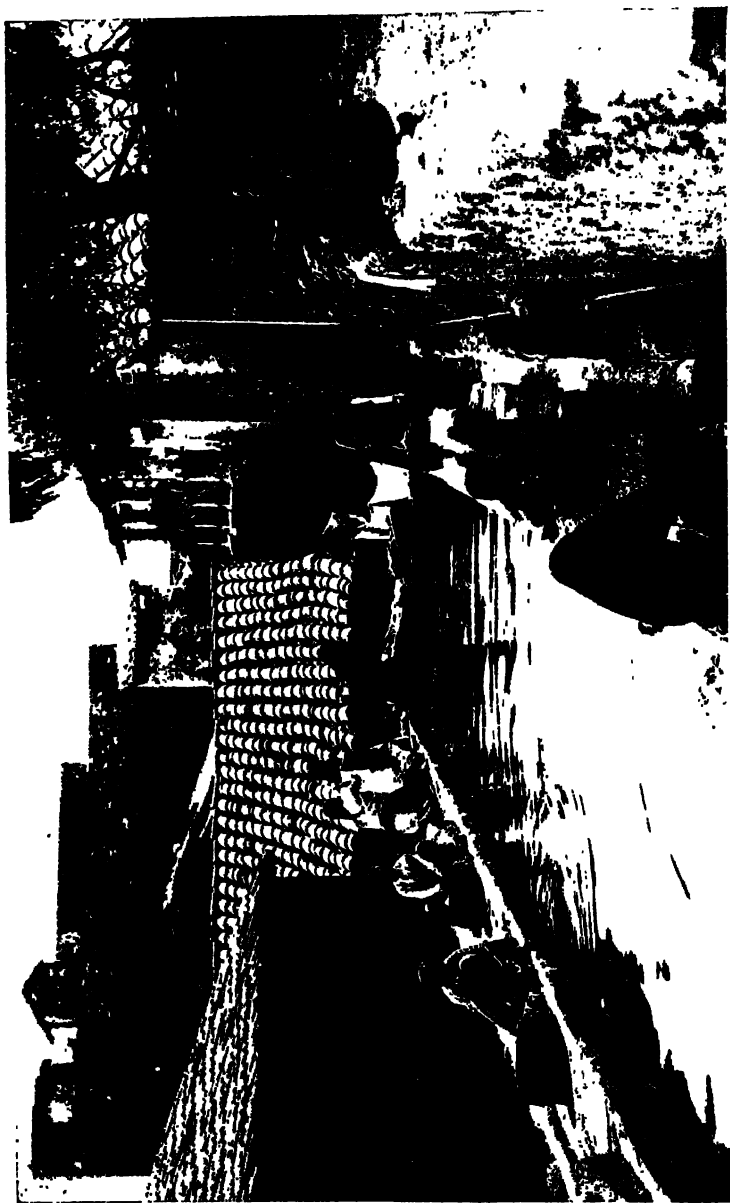
The Mexican government discouraged this super-revolutionary syndicate and it broke up after a time, but the inner feeling of almost all the abler artists seems to have remained loyal to the syndicate's concepts. Art became something of a political football since the reddest of painters must eat, even as the banker and the lesser bourgeoisie. Governments of the Revolution which were sincerely revolutionary, in the Mexican sense, gave the artists a decided boost in personal morale and in achievement. Those who were reactionary pressed their performance back into a mold of sycophancy. For a time the Communist Party controlled the Department of Education, which passed out the plums in the form of commissions for murals, and its patronage was as harmful as that of the unsympathetic reactionaries for where the party line led art must follow—and very closely too, or else . . .

The murals are, of course, the outstanding achievement of all the great moderns. They are always imposing, sometimes colossal, sometimes tedious, for one tends, in the course of time, to tire of being shouted at, however noble the theme of the shouting. Great murals are very conspicuous in Mexico City and one can hardly miss them. They are seen in the main entrance hall of the National Palace, in the University, the Secretariat of Education, the Preparatory School, the Bellas Artes Palace, the new Supreme Court building, the airport waiting room, and even on the stair-

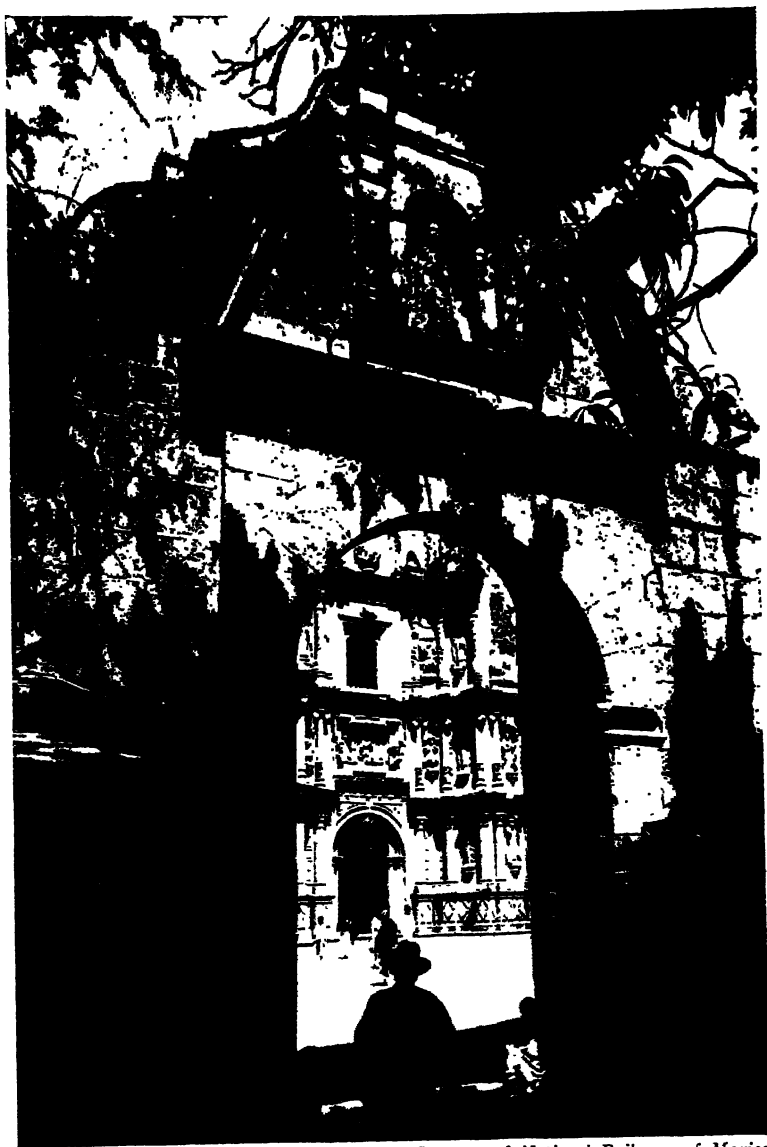




MARIACHIS, OR STROLLING MUSICIANS, ARE TYPICAL OF ALL PARTS OF MEXICO. THE WORD IS FROM THE FRENCH "MARIAGE," SINCE THE LITTLE BANDS ORIGINALLY PLAYED FOR WEDDING CEREMONIES.



BLUE MONDAY IN TAXCO.



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

OAXACA LURES ARTISTS FROM EVERYWHERE.



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

PATIO OF THE ANCIENT CONVENT OF SANTO DOMINGO.



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

**MONTE ALBAN—TREASURE CHAMBER OF ARCHEOLOGISTS.**



A TEHUANA IN SUNDAY FINERY.



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

THE GREAT TREE OF TULE WHICH WAS CENTURIES OLD WHEN CORTES SAW IT. TWENTY-FIVE MEN, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED AND FINGERTIPS TOUCHING, CAN BARELY ENCIRCLE THIS GREATEST OF THE EARTH'S ARBOREAL GIANTS. TULE IS NEAR OAXACA.



*Courtesy of National Railways of Mexico*

VIEWPOINT FOR THE FAMOUS DIVING HOLE OF DAREDEVILS AT ACAPULCO. DOZENS OF MEXICAN YOUNGSTERS ARE ALWAYS READY TO RISK THEIR LIVES FOR A PESO OR TWO.



way of Sanborn's, that attractive catch-all of life.

Diego Rivera still dominates the whole show so far as Americans are concerned. Orozco often shouts in louder tones and some of his bellowings are magnificent but he is of notably uneven quality. Rivera was the pioneer master and he remains the most celebrated and the most interesting. To state the case in terms of popular fame, almost everybody in the States has heard of Orozco but *everybody* has heard of Rivera—if that means anything. When a bubbling tourist, pointing to some large but inconsequential historical paintings in Chapultepec Castle exclaims, "Oh, those must be by Riviera [sic]," she is placing the crown of laurel on the artist's brow. She does not know his work but she has heard of him and that speaks volumes for his fame.

Actually the man Rivera is simple and natural in manner. He lives in a pink studio-villa, which is surrounded by a fence of ten-foot cactus spikes, directly opposite the famous San Angel Inn in the Villa Obregón suburb of the city. He often dines in the sunny patio of the inn and one Sunday noon I saw him there, unmistakably, dining with several friends. I called the head waiter and asked if it was in order for me to meet the famous man. "Of course. I will call him to your table," said the waiter, as though he were speaking of a *sommelier* or a shine boy. Before I could stop the man he was off and presently he returned with the Olympian in tow. Mr. Rivera was as friendly and unaffected as could be. For something to say I asked him, possibly with more haste than care, if enemies were still throwing ink and acids at portions of his murals which excited their hatred.

"Not much any more," he said. "I did the National Palace painting over when they spoiled it. Then they spoiled it again and I did it over again. I think they get tired doing it now. No trouble lately."

This interested me especially because I remembered having seen that huge mural during one of the periods when it was disfigured by acid, leaving a large and ugly white stain. The damaged part represented the "immorality of the church," as it does again in restoration. A priest holding a rosary kisses a voluptuous wanton and beside this scene is a tiny shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This was a dagger thrust at the very heart of popular piety and it is said that some enraged Indian threw the acid. I would have liked to ask Mr. Rivera, who has been, in general, the Indians' great friend, why he did not select the rich man's Virgin, she of los Remedios, for his taunt but I did not like, in such a casual chat, to question his judgment of his own country's problems. His artistic savagery toward the church is doubtless broad enough to include any kind of Virgin, priest or prelate. In a fresco in the Bellas Artes he has a huge and powerful church dominating "society at its worst;" and in the Cuernavaca mural his harshest moment is devoted to picturing a group of priests gloating over turquoises forced from the Indians as tribute.

John Gunther called Rivera "a painter of literally Michelangelan exuberance and power." The exuberance is certainly there but Mexicans are more prone than Americans to question the power. They are too close to him perhaps and cannot view the art without thinking of the man and his message. Those who hate communism tend to hate this man and all his works and they are sometimes most unreasonable in decrying the ability of one of their greatest compatriots. Far less violent than Orozco, who has often been the opponent of revolutionary demagoguery but who smashes many a wall with his murderous paints, Rivera is always preaching about something, generally the aspirations

of mankind. Occasionally he roars at the top of his paint brush, but he sometimes relaxes to the point of doing something merely to please the taste of visitors, including the genus tourist. And it is even whispered in Mexico City that he has been caught, of recent years, doing little things for the sheer pleasure of achieving something beautiful or striking—in other words art for art's sake. If that is true the revolutionary is slipping; but perhaps the artist is even advancing in his maturer life.

Personally I enjoy Rivera's work most when he gives lessons in Mexican history, however impregnated with allegorical sermonizing. His most comprehensive effort in this line remains the National Palace mural. Its story of the Revolution is very powerful even though colored by his persistent scorn of the church and his affectionate leanings toward communism. Anyone who sees it will long remember the smug cruelty in the countenances of the rightists surrounding Díaz, who all face the same way the dictator does and all show their owners' concern to maintain *orden* (order). Similarly one remembers the bright and devoted Revolutionists, each face directed opposite to that of Díaz and his group, each showing concern for the real values of life expressed in the conspicuous words (for those who cannot read expressions easily) TIERRA, LIBERTAD y PANE (Land, Liberty, Bread).

An equally striking lesson in history—and equally opinionated in its allegorical implications—is his pictorial account of the Conquest of Mexico seen in the loggia of the Cortés palace in Cuernavaca. That will receive comment in Chapter 17 but it should actually be considered as a companion piece to the artist's long historical "treatise" in the National Palace. The Cuernavaca masterpiece is, in fact, a sort of foreword to the treatise. The artist commenced it at

about the same time, completing it before he completed the larger work. It is characteristic of Rivera that he generally has two or three great undertakings advancing simultaneously. At intervals in his very busy life, he is now doing some further historical murals of enormous yardage, on the walls of the upper corridors of the National Palace but if he ever completes it, personally, it will be a major miracle. It would seem to demand several ordinary life spans.

### C. THE ROCKEFELLER REJECT IN THE FINE ARTS PALACE

The Rivera mural that naturally wins the most eager attention from American tourists is his copy of the one which he did for Mr. Rockefeller and which the latter destroyed at the request of many of his tenants who were irritated by the picture's glowing tribute to Russian communism. Rivera reconstructed it for Mexico's Palacio de Bellas Artes in almost the exact form he had planned for the New York structure. You may see the controversial work on the west wall of the third floor, called second floor—*segundo piso*—by the Mexican system, which considers that one flight of stairs takes you up to the "first floor." It is verbosely called "Man at the Crossroads, Looking with Uncertainty but with Hope to a Better World." Whatever your social views you will not fail to feel some sympathy for Mr. Rockefeller, honest capitalist and honest taxpayer. Lenin is conspicuously and very sympathetically featured in the mural, uniting various classes of mankind, and Mr. Rockefeller himself (though this may be a later and vengeful interpolation) is clearly but not at all sympathetically pictured having a good capitalistic time. As stated by Frances Toor, "In the group devoting themselves to the empty and degenerate pleasures of the bourgeoisie, is the picture of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,

the destroyer of the fresco in New York, with a glass of champagne in his hand." Careful scrutiny will show you that Mr. Rockefeller's other hand holds that of a lady and he kisses it gallantly. Beside him in the picture of "degeneracy" four women are absorbed in playing bridge and a man and a woman are engaged in excessively torrid dancing of the hot-cha school. Rivera sympathizers have condemned Mr. Rockefeller for junking the original mural, alleging that he had agreed to give the artist an absolutely free hand, but after all the patron did pay in full for the work. If the artist has added this personal aspersion in the reconstruction it speaks more for his fiery emotions than for his fairness. Mr. Rockefeller is a notably moral and conservative man, as everyone knows.

#### D. THE SEARCH FOR THE PAINTED WALLS

The search for the murals of Mexico City will be greatly aided by a good biped guide who knows and likes the art of his countrymen. These works were mostly commissioned by the government's Department of Education and some of the most massive of them are in public educational buildings. The buildings, chiefly in the "Left Bank" sector of the old city north of the cathedral, and sometimes of old colonial vintage, are confusing to one who looks for them on maps. Miss Brenner's guide, whose chapter on Modern Art is one of the liveliest discussions of the subject I have read, adds to the confusion, for those who try to follow her, by a jumbled vagueness in identifying these buildings (Chapters 4 and 14), which is decidedly unusual in her clear text. Perhaps she assumed that a walking and talking guide would supplement her words but a first rate cicerone on the subject of the murals is hard to come by.

The average short time visitor will desire to see only one or two of these huge art buildings and to understand as much as possible of what he sees. Very practical help in understanding the pictures but not in finding them can be had in pamphlet form in the *Interpretative Guides* by Frances Toor, sold in the American Bookstore and elsewhere.

The *Secretariat of Education* is perhaps the most important of all, as it is also the largest in "acreage" of mural decoration. Grip your map firmly and find the place in cartography before trying to find it by footwork. It is at the corner of Avenida Argentina and Calle Luis González Obregón; and this latter street is merely a single block of the important street that is República de Cuba to the west and San Ildefonso to the east. The corner is three blocks north of the rear of the cathedral.

This huge building, once the church of Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación but totally rebuilt in 1922, has a three-deck double patio which you will think the largest in the world—and maybe it is. It seems impossible that so much wall space could be covered with frescoes of any meaning but hardly a square inch escapes and one suspects that the artists felt a bit cramped since even the stairway walls, none too well lighted, are equally crowded with messages to the world. The walls of the library, the theatre, the administrative offices and other rooms are also covered almost solidly with paintings. I entered the room marked *Caballeros* to see if there were murals there, too, but there were none. Surely that and its counterpart for *Señoras* will not be much longer neglected.

Of course, the prolific art work in this building is explained in part by the fact that it is the Holy of Holies of the Department of Education, through which almost all purchases of artistic labor by the Mexican government are fun-

neled. But that does not entirely explain it. Mexican muralists love space and this is particularly true of Orozco who did some of this work. Rivera fathered the thing and the great majority of the panels, totaling 124, are actually by him. Other artists whose work is found in various parts of the building include such able men as Montenegro, Siqueiros, Mérida, Charlot and de la Cueva. The themes of the patio murals concern chiefly the struggles and hopes of the Indians and of the workers in their age-long combat against exploitation. There is rich detail, and a very great deal of it, on such subjects as the village customs of the peons, their work and play, their fiestas, dances, marriage and death ceremonies. There is much, too, about mining and factory life, about transportation on land and on sea, about arts and crafts and science. In fact, there cannot be any phase or facet of Mexican life, past or present, that does not have at least a few paltry yards of space. Around the top floor there is a long ballad of agrarian life and it is interspersed, in dozens of banners, with little homilies. A couple which virtually translate themselves into English may be set down here as typical: *La Verdadera Civilización Sera la Armonía de los Hombres con la Tierra y de los Hombres entre sí*; and this: *La Tierra es de todos como el Abre, el Agua y la Luz y el Calor del Sol*. The whole agrarian ensemble is a forthright sermon or series of sermons delivered through a loudspeaker. If it seems to you crude, violent and exaggerated, and if the proportions of many of the Indians and workers and of the "props" around them appear to be curiously pressed out of shape, remember that the great artists who did this work knew just what they were doing. The last thing any Mexican muralist desires to do is to paint a pretty picture. He wants to say something in arresting or even caustic tone. The only trouble with this, from the spectator's

point of view, is that after a few miles of such "talk" the eye grows weary even as the ear grows tired of a six-hour oration. One would think these muralists had been engaged in a conspiracy to filibuster so that no vote on their merits could be taken.

The *National Preparatory School* is almost as important and almost as large, murally speaking, as is the Secretariat. It is located only a stone's throw from the latter, being on the south side of Calle San Ildefonso (the same street, remember, as Calle L. G. Obregón) in the block between Argentina and Carmen. The building alone is one that would warrant stress—were there not so many—in the section devoted to tezontle palaces, for it is unusually massive and the red stain of the tezontle is especially appealing, being about the color of port wine. This building is often called, in parlance and on maps, the *Colegio de San Ildefonso*, which it formerly was, having been established as such by the Jesuits in 1749. It has funny little old windows and prodigious doors of carved wood, with attractive white marble and gray stonework to relieve the general severity.

Orozco was the chief decorator of this building, with almost all of the frescoes on the three-tiered main patio and its stairways to his credit, though Rivera is here, too, and several minor but very good painters, including Siquieros, Leal, Charlot and Fermín Revueltas. The name of Alfaro Siqueiros calls for more than passing mention for he is really one of the great Mexican men of art; but he has at times been so tangled in the official violences of the Communist Party that his artistic work has suffered greatly. When it has appeared publicly it has generally, as in this building, been terribly mutilated by vandals and by more honest folk whose feelings have been unbearably outraged by the man's political activities. His work, some of it never finished and some



badly defaced, is to be seen in the inner patio.

The historical paintings, especially those on themes of the Conquest, are of outstanding interest in this building. One may, for instance, see Orozco's idea of Cortés, of the Conqueror's mistress Malinche, and his fiery colleague Pedro de Alvarado (whose rash action brought the *noche triste* upon the Spaniards); and one may see (at the top of the main stairway in the larger patio) Jean Charlot's conception of the terrible occasion on which Cortés had the suspected Aztec porters slaughtered in the temple at Cholula. Other works of Orozco are seen in the new Supreme Court Building, in the Fine Arts Palace and on the landing of the staircase in Sanborn's. Others of Rivera are seen—almost everywhere, including the walls of one of the sumptuous dining rooms of *Ciro's* in Hotel Reforma. This last, full of startling nudes and preaching no special sermon, would seem to have been done chiefly to titillate tourists.

Comparisons between Rivera and Orozco are inevitable, for the fame of each is world-wide. The work of each is conspicuous in the United States as well as in Mexico. Rivera has been rather more prolific but the spread of Orozco's paintings is enormous, too. His famous "Epic of Civilization" in the Dartmouth College Library covers 3000 square feet and is called the largest coordinated "true fresco" in the United States. In general, Rivera is far the more serene of the two, and he has maintained a consistent social ideology, based on Marx, which he has "plugged" year in and year out. Orozco has been so violent and disordered as to be called a philosophical anarchist. Says George Kubler in his critique, "No doctrine animates his work; he portrays the endless variations of suffering and aspiration in compositional patterns which, unlike the centralized, stable de-

signs of Rivera, insist on broken forms, contradictory movements, and unresolved harmonies."

#### E. MODERNITY GONE MAD

It is inevitable that lesser artists of greater violence should follow in the wake of such a chaotic genius as Orozco. One of them, by name Jorge González Camarena, has done two paintings for the lobby of the ultramodern Guardiola Building (between the Fine Arts Palace and Sanborn's) and they are as conspicuous as possible, being directly over the elevators. If you view them see if you are more successful than I was in reading their message. One depicts a naked woman straight out of Brobdingnag. The other shows an equally colossal and equally undraped man engaged in some sort of desperate struggle. Possibly he is wrestling with temptation but frankly I do not know what he is doing. In waiting for the elevators, and often one must use them since various important offices are in the upper portion of the building, one feels inevitably as though one has wandered into some extraordinary sort of peep-show. That is, Americans feel this way. Mexicans, including the numerous stenographers in the building, are accustomed to artistic extravagances and apparently consider the pictures run-of-the-mill.

On the last afternoon of my most recent stay in Mexico City I wandered into the Fine Arts Palace and found that a special art exhibit, in the east room on the ground floor, was attracting attention. I entered and saw that a mixed collection of etchings and water colors was on display. The inspiration was certainly not from the great muralists. It seemed rather from Salvador Dali than from anything of the strictly Mexican school, but it showed to what lengths of madness modernity will go in a country which is newly

free and passionately proud of its freedom, when custom says, "Let art be unconstrained." Some few of the offerings were sane enough, even simple and pretty, but most of them were weird and many were markedly erotic. Avoiding description of the wildest ones, which would not be printable anyway, I will mention two middle-of-the-road water-colors, neither more nor less daring than the general average.

One presented a strumpet in diaphanous costume, walking under her umbrella through a rainstorm. To keep her "merchandise" untouched by the pelting rain she had removed her breasts from her blouse and was somehow holding them above her head, just under the protecting dome of the umbrella. The other picture showed a figure which cannot be clearly described in words. It started as a female nude, brandishing a murderous revolver, but the head was that of a fierce male peon, heavily bearded; and the whole affair was part of a horse whose head was straining forward in wild fright, its teeth showing horribly. One can, if in a mood of broad humor, see a certain pungent wit in the first picture, but the second seems art from the lunatic fringe. Perhaps the usual revolutionary theme of the peon's fight for justice was intended but the picture turned out to be merely a crazy "gynandrohip," a Mexican Houyhnhnm gone berserk.

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## CHAPTER X

### *Metropolitan Fun*

#### A. "SEE YOU AT SANBORN'S"

You do not actually need to say "See you at Sanborn's." Merely enter that emporium-of-everything at about five o'clock and you *will* see him or her. Sanborn's is all things to all tourists and, likewise, to an increasing number of well-born Mexicans. It is housed in an ancient private palacio called *Casa de Azulejos*, or House of Tiles, built of blue and white majolica.

As a building, quite regardless of its uses, it is one of the most famous in this hemisphere and the story of it, no more apocryphal than most popular tales, is a part of the story of Mexico. Briefly, the casa appears to have been built (but not of tiles) by a wealthy colonial nobleman about the year 1600. His son did much to develop trade with the Orient and won from the Spanish king a resounding title—Count of the Valley of Orizaba. At that point the family stock ran low for the count in turn had a son, Don Luis, who grew up as a restless spendthrift, never sticking to any task that was given him. "*You'll never build a house of tiles,*" the count taunted him, which was as if an American father of today were to say to his son, "*You'll never cut any ice in the business world.*" The taunt stuck and Don Luis, acquiring the ancestral house in the course of time, did build a house of tiles, or rather he rebuilt the ancestral house, covering it with the

beautiful blue and white tiles of Puebla which have been admired by all visitors to this city for the past three hundred years. It became, in 1890, the property of the severely exclusive and aristocratic Jockey Club, which used it as headquarters for about two decades until its antithesis, the Revolution of the People, took it over in 1910 as the "House of the Workers of the World." Then, after a short time, it became Sanborn's, when two able and energetic American brothers of that name bought it and developed the establishment we see.

Sanborn's sells almost everything under heaven that a tourist could wish to buy—silver articles, perfumes, leather ware, straw baskets, sarapes, antiques, drugs, novelties, postcards, and so on and on; and its restaurant-tearoom, located in the former patio of the palace, now glassed over, is a most alluring rendezvous.

Cheerful is the word for Sanborn's. The waitresses wear Mexican costumes as in the Monterrey branch of the house, the blouse being orange, yellow, red, or green, the skirt being striped and long, the cap or coif being a gay "runner" pinned to the hair and hanging down the back. The babel of talk and laughter in the thronged room is incessant from eight in the morning, when it opens, until nine-thirty in the evening, when it closes. The "chocolate doughnuts" which one purchases with coffee, tea, or chocolate, make a pleasant accompaniment for gossip, for earnest argument, or even for a bit of business, in the manner of Vienna's bright cafés. Sanborn's is the center of the metropolis, the center of the traveler's Mexico. Almost everything in the city is mentioned in relation to this nucleus. The giver of directions says to the newcomer, "You know Sanborn's, of course. Well, starting out from there—"

## B. EATING AROUND THE CAPITAL

Mexico City is definitely interesting to gourmets. In all Latin-America it is second only to Buenos Aires in this respect, though it by no means equals Buenos Aires in epicurean fare and neither is within gunshot of the old excellence of Paris. Emigrés from the *Club des Cent* would find few places in Mexico's capital to remind them of the best Parisian fare but the food is very good in several establishments and very fair in many. Meats are abundant and of good though not Argentine quality; fowl, especially chicken and turkey, will be found everywhere; and there is an ample variety of vegetables and an amazing array of fruits. The raw materials of good eating are abundant in establishments patronized by travelers, but the cooking may often be uninspired and the service sketchy. In the capital's restaurants the variety of décor, and that indefinable something that makes "atmosphere" as against pretense, is outstanding and it is fair to say that many places which serve indifferent food do have special character or special patronage to add interest and offset culinary lacks. In all this we are, of course, considering *international* establishments and food, Mexico's broad heritage from Europe, tintured by the natural desire to appease American tastes. There are two distinct "philosophies of food" throughout the country, Spanish-Mexican and Indian-Mexican. The Indian-Mexican restaurants and their offerings will be mentioned later.

Americans, unless they are of the most fashionable late-dining set, find meal hours in Mexico a bit awkward. The "noon" meal is ordinarily between 2:00 and 3:30 (though the government's startling edict of June, 1944, reducing the siesta period from three hours to one hour has partly "Amer-

icanized" the capital's eating habits). The evening meal (but not at Sanborn's and other American-type places) begins at 9:00 or 9:30. If you enter a restaurant at 8:30 you are almost alone in it.

*Sanborn's* is the starting point for most gastronomical explorers since it is the first place outside of the hotel restaurant that anyone is sure to find. I hope I shall not be haled as a heretic before some inquisitorial tribunal if I state that I personally find Sanborn's food uninspired except for the good breakfast fare. I go there—and very often—because I love the animation of the place. I think it is the most attractive center of sociability in the whole of Latin-America; and its breakfasts *are* inspired. A costumed waitress brings the morning paper (upon request) and life becomes instantly very pleasant. The coffee is outstandingly good and the ham and eggs, hot cakes, toast and marmalade wonderfully homelike. The patio-under-glass radiates pleasant life and hums with conversation, even if you have "helped open it" at the crack of winter dawn. The noon and evening menus provide a *plato del dia* (plate dinner), a *comida corrida* (table d'hôte dinner) and various items à la carte, both international and Indian. The prices are moderate.

*Lady Baltimore*, across the way from Sanborn's, is another crowded American-Mexican stronghold of eating and chat. To me it seems somehow to lack the oomph of its famous neighbor.

*Prendes* is a bare place without any smartness of style whatever. It has, in fact, only one thing to offer, namely *food*. To *Prendes* I have returned time and again for that very thing—food. So many others go there for the same thing—first families of Mexico, old residents (of all nationalities), tourists who have been "told"—that it is not easy to secure

a table during the evening hours but if you do get one you may be very sure that first-rate viands, marvelously cooked, will presently be brought at your order. *Prendes* is an institution in the metropolis. Its popularity with men is enormous but many women go there, too. Beer may be had on draft, and the word for a good satisfying bumper is *tarro*.

*Ciro's*, in Hotel Reforma, is perhaps the smartest international restaurant in the city; also one of the most expensive. It is worth visiting, if only to see the famous Rivera nudes, reproductions of which, in postcard form, are left on every table for the use of the guests. It would be interesting to know how many of these cards are annually sent through the mails to challenge the U. S. postal authorities and to shock Aunt Ella and Uncle Charles back home. The food in *Ciro's*—much more than incidentally—is very good and the service excellent.

The *Ritz* and the *Majestic* both have luxurious dining rooms and serve top quality food. These are generally grouped with *Ciro's* and *Prendes* in connoisseur selections of the all-capital "best." The restaurant of *Hotel Genève* is also very good but it is more on the homey style, like a huge and first-rate European pension. Since it is rather far uptown few explorers go there solely to eat. They go to eat with friends who live there. The *Maya Room* and grill of Hotel Regis are of higher standing and quality than the hotel itself and they have long been popular with Americans.

*Club Papillon* (18 Avenida Madero) must surely be included in any select group as big as six. This is a luxury place and its steaks are thick and luscious.

*Henri* (8 Calle López) is an excellent place of authentic French cuisine and atmosphere. It goes in for cooked-to-order masterpieces with French names for which you wait long and pay plenty. I found it worth all it cost, including



the expression of cold disapproval on the face of the waiter when I once ordered beer. I was charged 1.25 pesos for this beverage, as against the usual 75 centavos, but it was not I who was outraged. Rather it was Henri, who could scarcely countenance such a desecration of his premises. The wines in his *cave* are a point of pride.

*Manolo* (corner Juárez and López) is among the smartest of all the capital's restaurants in its appearance, service and clientèle. It leans to the Italian side in its cuisine but is luxuriously international. The impeccably clad waiters are more than ready to instruct the guest as to the exact specialties of the house most deserving his attention and the whole atmosphere is socially pretentious. Music and dancing enliven the evening meal. I have much enjoyed Manolo's food but some of my friends have reported not-so-good luck.

*Fonda Santa Anita* (90 Av. Juárez) made its bow to the world in 1944. It is a large luxury place in a basement floor and set its cap for the elite of Mexico's stage and radio stars, hoping no doubt to win the curious by this sort of personal attraction. It is a place of first rank but I have been unable to feel much impressed. It is all right, I would say.

*American Club* (31 Calle Bolívar) has a cheerful top-floor restaurant open to non-members. It is a touch of home for the nostalgic.

*Café Tupinamba* (Calle Bolívar, other side from American Club) is very Spanish-Mexican in type. It is considered a haunt of the bull ring fraternity and you may actually see some swaggering *toreros* there.

*Paolo* (11 Calle Gante) used to be a great favorite of the knowing but, alas, it has shrunk practically to the proportions of a bar. It maintains but two tablecloth tables in one corner but some excellent dishes can still be had if you ever manage to secure one of the two tables. I have not been so

lucky and my disappointment has been considerable for I remember the old place with enthusiasm.

*La Cucaracha* (3 Calle Gante), despite its rather banal name (meaning cockroach), is a smart place of the grill type with excellent steaks.

*Latino-Americano* (at the Columbus glorieta on Paseo Reforma, near Hotel Reforma) is on the ground floor of Mexico's most sumptuous apartment house. It is more or less coffee-shop style but smart, because of its location, and altogether delightful at any time of day. The food is good, too. (Music in the late afternoon.)

*El Molino* (41 Av. 16 de Septiembre) belies its very inconspicuous entrance. It has an excellent coffee shop in front and a large first-class dining room in the rear. This is a thoroughly cheerful place with pleasant wall paintings of Holland and of Paris' *Moulin Rouge*, for which it is inappropriately named.

*Moscu* (27 Calle Paris opposite Hotel Reforma) made its elegant bow in 1944 in deference to great Russia. It is good. Another place very Russian in the somewhat synthetic style of Paris' Boul' Mich' is un-Russianly called *Conti* and is to be found downtown near Henri's. It is studenty, arty and *intime* with good borsch and other Muscovite specialties.

*Chapultepec* (on Paseo Reforma at the entrance to the park) is a large and excellent place. If Tio (Uncle) Hupfer is still the manager of this place when you visit it he will be very didactic about helping you order and his voice will boom in your ear (in any language) with all the volume of the Bull of Bashan. The Chapultepec offers excellent food and there is music and dancing in the evening.

*Ostionerías* (oyster bars) are very numerous in Mexico City and they offer their natural specialty, *Ostiones Cóctel*, at unbelievably low prices—often as low as half a peso, which

is a dime—even in presentable and cheerful places. One of the best Ostionerías in the city is just where you would expect to find it, adjoining the Senate Building, and it boasts of securing its oysters from Guaymas, which has been for centuries a celebrated source of bivalves. This oyster palace is across the street from the National Telegraph Office, just north of Calle Tacuba. The name of the street—take a deep breath—is Calle Santiago Felipe Xicotencatl.

*San Angel Inn* (in the suburb Villa Obregón) is quite as widely famous for its food as for its venerable atmosphere. A Sunday afternoon dinner in its sunny patio is a thing worth going far to enjoy—but Villa Obregón is not very far by taxi.

Humbler restaurants by the score deserve mention but only four shall find it here.

*Calvi* (on Av. Independencia just west of San Juan de Letrán) is a modest family-style restaurant where tourists are rarely seen. Its conspicuous motto—*Esta Casa Jamás Alterara la Calidad de sus Productos* (This House Will Never Vary the Quality of its Products)—seems to me justified. I have found the food definitely good at prices little more than half of those charged by most other places where I have eaten. Calvi has its own bakery and the breads are always fresh.

*Club Tampico* (Av. Juárez next to Hotel Regis) serves an amazing Spaghetti Caruso draped in the Mexican national colors. Red is from peppers; white from egg white; green from parsley. There is a yellow band too from the egg yolks—just for good chromatic measure.

*Los Naranjos* (The Orange Trees, at 122 Paseo Reforma, opposite Hotel Reforma) is a pleasant little place specializing in Spanish foods.

*La Copa de Leche* (The Cup of Milk, at 10 Calle San Juan

de Letrán) is one of the few Mexican-managed quick lunch establishments that attract Americans. It is a vast, noisy, bright-light establishment where you can get satisfying late-evening snacks to go with your "cup of milk" or your *tarro de cerveza* (beer).

Café de Tacuba (28 Calle Tacuba) is the capital's great temple of Indian-Mexican food. It is also a shrine of Spanish-Colonial culture, with somewhat self-conscious Mozarabic architecture and all the properties suitable to a Spanish court dining room of the time of Columbus. One of its rooms is like an old sacristy and another resembles a chapel. The latter is called Salón de la Virgen and has just the right aristocratic-ecclesiastical touch, a painting of the Virgen de los Remedios. The establishment's other paintings include two of special interest, being portraits of Borda, the eighteenth century silver king of Taxco, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the fabulous nun.

This restaurant is the one best place in which to explore the challenging subject of Indian food for it is first-rate in every respect and the food is authentic rather than touristic. Any sort of tortilla may be tried as a starter since this has been the Indian's staff of life for some six thousand years. It is a pancake made of corn which has submitted to a thorough soaking in lime water (hence the gleaming white teeth of all Indians) and has then been ground into a paste and slapped to the proper thinness. Your waitress will probably speak a word or two of struggling English but if you have the luck to visit the Café de Tacuba with a Mexican friend or a long-time resident you will do far better in your venture. Be it known at least that a *taca* is a tortilla "roll" filled with chopped meat or fowl or maybe cheese and then fried; that an *enchilada* is a taco drowned in chili sauce and other

hot condiments and sprinkled with grated cheese; that a *quesadilla* (which is the street-stand "hamburger" of Mexico) is a tortilla filled with the same items as the taco, or maybe with pumpkin seeds, and then deftly formed into a sort of turnover which is fried in lard. The *tamal* (tamale) is a tortilla rolled around meat or nuts and raisins and then placed in corn husks to be steamed for hours. *Chile con carne* is not a Mexican dish at all but a Texan dish more or less recently imported into Mexico to provide something which Americans will recognize as "typically Mexican." The Tacuba's *tortilla tostada* won my personal blue ribbon. It is a flat toasted-and-fried affair lavishly covered with chicken and beans and a spicy salad.

Beans (*frijoles*) are as basically Indian as tortillas and one encounters them in a variety of forms but oftenest as a brown-mauve paste which looks but does not taste like chestnut paste. Rice (*arroz*), boiled and then fried, generally accompanies the beans.

A special dainty which rouses the curiosity of bold tourists is the *gusano de maguey*, which is a slug, white in color, that has fed himself fat on hearts of cactus. A slug is closely related to a snail, which is, after all, a worm that carries his house on his back. Any dictionary will tell you that. So a Mexican *gusano* may properly be considered as highbrow as his cousin Escargot de Bourgogne.

More substantial dishes than the above are equally exciting but cause no similar shuddering. Two need special stress for they may be had in any large restaurant that prepares food in the native style. They are *Mole de Guajolote* and *Huachinango à la Veracruzana*. Mole is a truly delectable curry sauce, generally dark brown in color and composed of pumpkin seeds, chili, chocolate and sixteen varieties of spices. Always one is told that the spices must num-

ber *sixteen*, so I suppose it would be ruined if there were fifteen or seventeen. Anyway it is delicious and as served on a base of guajolote it is the national dish of Mexico and has been so since Moctezuma served it to his guest Cortés. Guajoloté is traditionally, though not necessarily, turkey (*pavo* is the common word for turkey) and the bird is amazingly catholic in appeal, for emperors have loved it yet it is definitely the meat of the commoner. "After all, a turkey is only a glorified buzzard," explained a Mexican friend of mine. Mole de Guajolote, whatever its lineage or social quality, is a delicious dish; and if you see on any Mexican menu any dish with the word mole in it (as Mole Poblana, which is Mole in the style of Puebla) order it and be rewarded.

Huachinango à la Veracruzana is a fish classic quite the equal of the fowl classic which has aroused my lyric outburst. It is red snapper sautéed with olives, pimientos and, of course, a collection—perhaps less than sixteen—of warm-to-hot spices. This is rather more Spanish-Colonial than Indian and the Prendes Restaurant is celebrated for its conception of this great fish dish—but Café Tacuba knows all about it too.

*Pescado blanco* is another wondrous delicacy but you may have to wait for a sample of it until you reach the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro or Lake Chapala, for this "white fish"—and it is actually translucent and almost transparent—is an exceedingly delicate creature and it can be transported only with difficulty. A popular story relates that President Díaz once sent a tankful of live pescados blancos to King Edward VII and Edward liked them so very much, and said so, that the Mexican dictator felt obliged to send him a fresh tankful each year. It was so extraordinarily difficult to achieve this with success that it caused something like an annual crisis in Mexican foreign policy; but perhaps it did at least offer a

practical and interesting problem to the dictator's Científicos. I did not blame King Edward when I sampled this fish, so marvelously dainty and esculent, in the restaurant of the *Posada de Don Vasco* of Pátzcuaro village. I wish for you the same treat.

*Fruits* beyond numbering and naming enhance any Indian feast of Mexico. *Aguacate*, a black-skinned variety of avocado pear, is one of the most delicious. This is sometimes called a vegetable but it does, after all, grow on a tree. *Papaya*, with its orange-yellow lusciousness, is familiar to all who have been anywhere in the tropics. To the cool plateau of Mexico it is brought from the hot south or the *tierra caliente* of the coastal belts. *Guayaba* is less esteemed for itself, eaten raw, than for the wonderful paste, called *guayabate*, which is made from it. Guayabate is a sweet staple of many Latin-American lands, including Mexico. *Zapote*, of the dark variety (there are several others), is a special fruit for which I have developed a particular weakness. Its skin is green, its pulp an alluring "dark pink," the flavor is indescribable, so I will not describe it. And, finally, since this is the land of cactus, keep on the watch for two cactus fruits (which, however, you may not like) called *tuna* and *pitahaya*. The tuna, which is cool and pleasant when the prickly coat has been peeled off, is from that branch of the cactus family (*nopal*) on which the eagle was standing as he devoured the serpent.

*Candies* of kinds hardly known to most Americans are common in Mexico. *Biznaga* is the most typically Mexican and therefore the most favored. It is candied cactus, pale green-white in appearance and very delectable. San Antonio and other Texas cities now offer it to delighted tourists on their way to Mexico. Candied yam (*camote*) and candied pumpkin (*calabazate*) are also popular; and various fruit

pastes, mostly coming from the Morelia region, are as full of allure as of flavor.

The adventure of eating in Indian Mexico offers great attraction to the un-timid visitor. With a little meal-to-meal advice from one who knows his gastronomical way it can be vastly enjoyed and the palate need not be scorched to a crisp.

### C. THE SIGN OF THE TILTING GLASS

Mexico City is as gay, at least in the sense of the tilting glass, as any city on earth. Here, as Rivera's frescoes would say, "the empty and degenerate pleasures of the bourgeoisie" flourish mightily.

Tourist drinks in Mexico are definitely international rather than of-the-country, with the single exception of *tequila*, which is passably popular but so very inexpensive that sporty spenders are ashamed to order it. "It is done," however, in the city of Guadalajara, near which the drink is made, and in Taxco, where a famous tequila cocktail called the "Bertha" is an established feature of life. Bertha herself holds forth like a stout brown priestess of Bacchus in her own crude but celebrated bar. In Mexico City a Bertha (pronounced Bair-ta) or a dash of straight tequila *can* be had in any bar and if (not being an Oriental) you are not worried about "face" you will probably try it and greatly enjoy it. There are two kinds, but *tequila blanca* (white, which is to say colorless) is the kind usually served. It is a cordial of strange subtlety and it "creeps up on you" with unexpected power.

Tequila is made from a form of maguey (century plant), which is not in the strictest sense a cactus but is always so considered. The fleshy lower leaves are roasted, crushed and then left in large casks to ferment. The juice is distilled later



by a complicated process. The liquor, as ultimately refined, has a taste that is all its own but which some consider to resemble Bourbon. The Bertha, made with lime juice and simple syrup, looks like a Tom Collins but tastes remarkably like a Daiquiri. The analogy is interesting in more ways than one for if Cuba has made a lady out of rum certainly Mexico has made a lady out of maguey juice. It is safe to say that if tequila were to cost five dollars a fifth in Mexico as it does in New York, and if a Bertha were to cost seventy-five cents instead of fifteen cents (or maybe twenty-five cents in smart bars), it would be ordered a great deal oftener by tourists. No one who stands treat wishes to be thought "Scotch" and therefore it is quite impossible to order a round of drinks that cost only fifteen or twenty or twenty-five cents apiece. The solution is to buy tequila in New York, where it is exotic and costs enough, and to buy imported gin and *uiski* in Mexico.

The distilled *mezcal* and the fermented *pulque*, both made from types of maguey, are hardly for tourist palates or stomachs, though millions of Indians take passionate pleasure in them. Mezcal, like tequila, is colorless and it is perhaps even more potent. Oaxaca is the center of its manufacture and consumption. If you try it there or elsewhere be sure to drink it in the accepted fashion, which is also the way to drink straight tequila. First, you shake on the back of your left hand (assuming the right to be your drinking hand) a dash of "salt," which is actually made from maguey slugs with a bit of chili. Toss off the fiery drink at one gulp, as if it were Swedish *aquavit*. Then suck a bit of lemon and hurl the slug salt nonchalantly from the back of your hand onto your tongue.

As for pulque, the peon's "likker," it is simply too raw for Americans, except as a bold experiment. Fresh pulque,

not thoroughly fermented, is the liquid called aguamiel (honeywater), the common drink of country Indians. As finally fermented and served in city bars—and pulque may be sampled *only* in lowbrow *pulquerías*, not in regular bars—it is a murky and, to most Americans, a rank and offensive liquor. One drinks it for no other reason than to be able to say one has done so.

Bars in the metropolis of Mexico are more numerous, if possible, than are restaurants. Those of the chief hotels, especially the *Ritz Bar* (with the Covarrubias fresco) and *Tony's* of the Reforma, are tremendously popular, as is that of the less swanky *Regis*. The *Salón California* on the Paseo Reforma, and the *Bar 1-2-3* at 123 Calle Liverpool (near Hotel Genève) are uptown haunts. The bar of the *Club Papillon* (on Avenida Madero) is as smart as its adjacent restaurant.

One may offer a note of comfort to those who, from principle or from health considerations, desire to avoid strongly alcoholic drinks and yet do not wish to miss all the fun. There is a mild, delicious, and thoroughly Mexican beverage called sangría, being a mixture of claret and lemon juice. It "giveth color in the cup" yet it is not *incandescent* like the cactus drinks.

Ladies in Mexico are still supposed to think of bars as they think of cigars—"for men only." You will read cautionary remarks to that effect in many a guidebook. But it is obvious that our American free-and-easiness is breaking that taboo to smithereens in the capital and the chief tourist resorts. One now sees women by the dozen in almost any first-class bar and not all of them are American tourists. Nor are they international adventuresses and diabolically clever spies.

## D. EVENINGS IN ALL KEYS

Evening entertainment of the loftier sort centers largely in the magnificent Palace of Fine Arts. Here one may enjoy spectacles of every sort, ballet being a prime diversion. Music also centers here, ranging from that of the *Orquesta Sinfónica de México*, perhaps under the baton of the celebrated Carlos Chavez, to performances by world-known soloists in every branch of the art. Mexico scraped the bin of its national exchequer to provide this wonderful setting for the fine arts and lucky are you and I to find the palace ready for our patronage, always at very moderate cost.

Luxurious modern movie houses, offering current Hollywood films, are abundant in Mexico City but of the capital's legitimate theatres only the *Iris* (24 Calle Donceles) and the *Lírico* (8 Av. Cuba) are much patronized by visiting Americans without a knowledge of colloquial Spanish. The goal will be chiefly determined by whether or not the world-famous Cantinflas is billed. This limp comedian with a line of double talk which invariably convulses Mexican audiences has been seen in the *Iris* of late. I saw him in a drunken sketch called *Posadas Cantinfleras* and despite the fact that his tricky talk flowed mostly over my head, I thought him a true genius. The man has, to a marked degree, the gift which everyone recognizes and no one can define—personality.

The word *posada* (literally “inn”) refers to a peculiarly Mexican custom and if you are in that country just before Christmas you may likely experience it in one form or another to provide an evening in a key quite unknown elsewhere. On the nine nights preceding and including *Navidad*, which is “Nativity”—which is Christmas—Mexican

families imitate the journey of the Holy Family from Nazareth to Bethlehem by going to the house of a friend (and the next night to another friend, and the next night to another, and so on and on), knocking and asking for "lodging," which is always granted—by prearrangement—in the form of a party. In these modern times in the fashionable capital each "lodging" develops into a dance and big time but it includes a religious procession with candles—which is taken lightly as part of the festival. The climax is the breaking of the *piñata*, which is a large, flimsy, paper-covered contraption that is suspended from the ceiling. Various persons, blindfolded, take swings at it with a stick and at last someone hits it mightily and a shower of candy, nuts, little presents of all sorts, falls to the floor. Of course, a grand scramble ensues and fun is had by all. If you do not participate in a *posada* of purely Mexican stamp you may at least enter into the somewhat synthetic version which is offered during the Christmas season at various night clubs and at Riveroll's.

*Riveroll's*—write it in your memory—is an entertainment specialty of Mexico City and although it is frankly touristic it is also authentic and interesting. The Riveroll Home is at 35 Calle Colón, a quiet street back of Hotel Regis. Here Mexican costume dances are presented each Wednesday evening at nine o'clock (admission five pesos) and the performances are meticulously faithful to native art rather than giddy shows trumped up for foreigners. Delightful and charming are the provincial dances of Michoacán, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Tehuana, Yucatán and so forth. The evening is properly liquefied by what are called tequila cocktails, served gratis in the "Pulquería," while a marimba band provides Latin rhythms. It seems to this witness and participant that neither the drink nor the bar is as authentic as are the dances. The cocktails prove to be tiny glasses of straight

tequila rather than big Berthas, and the Pulqueria serves no pulque. But one must not be too literal in mood. Gaiety is enhanced and joy is let loose. You will get a very big dollar's worth at Riveroll's.

#### E. THE CLUBS OF MIDNIGHT

Night life in Mexico City is extremely abundant and some of it is of first-rate international quality. Connoisseurs consider that there are only five night clubs which are definitely smart in music, entertainment and food. They are all in the same general neighborhood, *Ciro's* (Hotel Reforma), *El Patio* at 9 Calle Atenas, *Minuit*, in the Latino-Americano skyscraper at the Columbus glorieta, *Sans Souci* at the Cuauhtémoc glorieta and Casanova, a little farther out, near Hotel Genève. Four of these were flashlighted by *Life's* able photographers and they appear in an article of a back number which will be of considerable interest to those whom the subject interests. The date of the magazine is February 28, 1944. *El Patio*, less exclusive and generally more popular than the others, is the ever-excellent veteran of the company. The others are all of later vintage, making their bows in 1942, 1943 or 1944. The *Sans Souci*, newest of them, is operated by the operators of the like-named club in Havana which has been the stellar attraction of the Cuban capital for years.

Most lesser night clubs have a tendency to come and go with the seasons. Some are showy and not-bad. Others are just showy. Mexico correctly believes that American tourists are always searching for exotic night life, so the purveyors of such entertainment work hard at their lucrative task.

## F. EXPLORERS AT TENAMPA

The lower levels of night life ramify amazingly. I was advised by a knowing Mexican to take a taxi on some Saturday evening to *Tenampa* and see what I should see. So I murmured the magic name to a taxi driver and presently found myself in a lowbrow little square marked Plaza Garibaldi. The most conspicuous thing in the square was a small and dingy-bright café neon-labeled TENAMPA. In it were several groups of gaily costumed street musicians, of the type always called *mariachis*, oddly from the French word *mariage*, because originally they were players at wedding feasts. They were twanging their guitars and tossing off the last bumpers of beer preparatory to taking their talent out into the night. One such group, eagerly sniffing gratuities, came to my table and serenaded me with such a din that my ears rang. An artist in crayons rushed up and did a hasty caricature of me, leering at me the while in the manner of Paris café artists. The resultant masterpiece he generously thrust upon me, asking two pesos for it. I was too weak to refuse so I gave him the money and also the portrait.

Finding the Café Tenampa very far from fragrant, I presently withdrew and walked about to see the sights of the night. I found, for one thing, numerous *carpas*, which are tent-shows set up in the side streets. They are typical of popular life everywhere in Mexico. You enter the tent, pay ten centavos per act and watch the crudest, liveliest, most variegated show imaginable. Pulque tenors vie with impersonators and jokesmiths and all of them vie, rather unsuccessfully, with glorified girls who stamp the helpless stage and trot about as if they expected the audience to think it dancing. Miss Brenner has a word for the *carpas*. She calls the

shows "sincere," and they are just that. There is no question that every performer is in dead earnest about the whole thing; as artists they are doubtless very kind people, earning what they can for their needy dependents. I saw a lot of acts so they earned about a quarter of a dollar from me.

Mexico City—they say—has done away with the red light district, but it has certainly not "done it very far away." Cynics assert that instead of one enormous wide-open district there are now five smaller ones slightly less open and less blatant. In all the little streets in all directions from Tenampa there are hundreds and hundreds of ladies-of-the-night, many of them seeming to be mere girls. And there are dance-halls galore. I entered two or three of these but whatever the character and motives of the individuals in the motley throng the dancing appeared to be quite un-wicked. The grimy establishments, some with very fancy names, are densely packed with unwashed humanity having a good time. I could profitably have worn a gas mask. In one very pretentious "palace," with something like two acres of dance floor, a Mexican youth startled me by taking me under his wing—very kindly and impulsively I must say—and going the rounds to find me a partner. He was not commercially minded, nor were the girls "on the make." In fact, his generous search proved unsuccessful. Every girl—and most of them were Toltecs or Aztecs—was already doing very well and needed no gringo caballero. Perhaps you will have better luck—or worse.

The name of that typical dance palace of the very-low-class is *Salón Mexicana* and it is to be found on the Calle Pensador Mexicano. Yes, that is the "Street of the Mexican Thinker." Perhaps it was "The Thinker" himself who put aside contemplation and tried so generously to find me a Saturday night dance partner.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Sport and Speed*

#### A. THE SUNDAY BULL RING

THE bullfight, called *corrida de toros*, takes place at four o'clock on Sunday afternoons and is the event of the week to many thousands of Mexicans, the event of the trip to many tourists. The period from October until Lent is the high season when the best bullfighters of two hemispheres are seen. Admission prices range from a minimum of four pesos to whatever tourists will pay. Reserved seats at twenty to fifty pesos (four to ten dollars) are snapped up like special bargains and sometimes even the hotel porters can hardly secure for importunate guests seats at any price. There is an official ticket office on that short wide street called Calle Ejido, leading from the Caballito to the huge copper-domed Revolution Monument, and it is worth finding (on the north side, corner of Calle Emparán) if you would like to go to a lot of trouble to save considerable money. Here seats may be bought as un-rich Mexicans buy them, by standing in a queue and working your way at the pace of a dying snail up to the ticket window. Sunny-side seats (*Sol*) are as cheap as four pesos, shady-side seats (*Sombra*) as cheap as seven pesos.

The urgent and unflagging demand (many a Mexican stenographer and shop girl annually invests her slender savings in a season ticket) seems to me one of the phenomena



of life. Having seen in Spain enough bullfighting to satisfy me, I cared little whether I saw a corrida in Mexico; but once, at a few minutes before four on a big Sunday, I made my casual way to the bull ring and was lucky in picking up from a scalper a rush ticket for the shady side at a mere ten pesos. I was presently seated just as the first bull came thundering into the arena. I had paid about a quarter as much as most of my friends and my seat was perfectly placed so that I could see the whole show without too close a view of—blood. Granting that there was extraordinary luck in this, I proudly claim that there was also a modicum of calculation back of the luck. The Mexican *aficionados* (fans) who go in multitudes to the bull ring every Sunday consider ten pesos a lot of money. They can get seats on the sunny side of the ring for four or five pesos and for these cheap seats they make a tremendous rush. On the other hand, the tourists seem to consider ten pesos very little money for so superlative a spectacle and the society Mexicans, who wish to be seen in the smart section if at all, avoid the rush seats, regardless of sun or shade, as if they were highly dangerous to health. So it often develops that the seven to ten peso Sombra seats are too dear for the multitude, too cheap for society and tourism. They happen to be just right for me, and possibly for you if you wish to try the “system,” remembering that luck may not favor you.

I find it hard to be fair to bullfighting. I know that there is skill, high bravery, even genius in the performance of a first-rate fighter. It is thrilling to watch the fighter weave his supple body to right and left, scarcely moving his feet while a ton of animal savagery, keyed to kill, thunders past him a dozen times, the stiletto-sharp horns grazing his satin-clad thigh each time. It is thrilling to witness the frenzy of twenty-five thousand aficionados shouting their rhythmic *Jolé Jolé*

*Jolé* like a monster metronome in time with the fighter's movements. But even so, I must confess that I do not like the sport. I am not a fan. The fact that it is a performance repeated six times at every *corrida* without perceptible differences (except to the student of the art) makes it boresome to many mere onlookers. And the fact that a dull-witted animal can "win" against a brilliant man only once in a hundred times makes it—to me—something less than a sporting proposition. Also, my heart aches for the poor old hacks that once were horses and become dead meat on Sunday afternoons; and for the bulls themselves when their turn comes to vomit blood and stumble down to death. I repeat that I am not fair to bullfighting and any true aficionado will rightly and hotly resent what I have just said. Also, he will think me stupid.

A curious bit of comic relief to this discussion is the word *toreador*. There is no such word in Spanish. Georges Bizet invented it for the opera *Carmen* because he happened to need a four-syllable word for the rhythm of the famous "Toreador Song." Americans took it up so naturally and insistently that it finally has begun to force its way into dictionaries. My own two-way dictionary solves the problem rather neatly. In the English-Spanish section it gives "bull-fighter—toreador." In the section headed *Español-Inglés* it gives the correct word, *torero*, but not the metrical invention of Bizet.

#### B. THE LIGHTNING OF JAI-ALAI

The lightning of jai-alai (*pelota*) may prove to be only "heat lightning." The Cárdenas régime banned the game all over Mexico because gambling is an integral part of it, as of horse racing everywhere. The Avila Camacho régime

retained the ban for a time, but in middle-of-the-road fashion has relaxed the enforcement of it to some extent. It is not widely featured as in the old days but by watching the papers closely you may see an advertisement of *Juego de Pelota*. Or more simply, ask the presumably omniscient head porter of your hotel, and do not be easily put off.

The game's origin seems obviously traceable to the Maya-Aztec game of *tlaxtli* or *tlaihiyotentli*, whose ancient ball-courts are such stimulating sights today in Chichén-Itzá, Copán and elsewhere; but there is a Basque game also which claims to be its parent, and actually most of the good players are of Basque origin. Perhaps the two old strains were united in wedlock to produce the modern jai-alai. The name means "always fiesta" or "always gay" in the Basque language and it is pronounced, for all practical purposes, like "high ally." This game, which is a picture of living speed, is so familiar to thousands of Americans who have visited Havana that it hardly needs description here—especially since it still remains under a cloud of disapprobation in Mexico.

If the cloud rolls away enough to make this game satisfactorily visible while you are in Mexico City, you will find it being played in a large *frontón* (playing court) close beside the Revolution Monument. I wish you better luck than travelers to Mexico have usually enjoyed in the Cárdenas and post-Cárdenas eras. Although not so well played as in Cuba the game is terrific even here. It lifts you to your feet a hundred times to yell applause with the crowd.

#### C. FUTBOL AND BEISBOL

A surprising feature of Mexican sport, in very recent years, is the success of American football (in competition with the

ever-popular soccer) and baseball. As one of 7000 spectators I saw my first game of football in Mexico City, in 1941, and was amazed by its speed and general excellence. The contestants were the University of Mexico and Politécnico, a college of the same metropolis, and the university's team was coached by an able American, Bernard A. Hoban, of Dartmouth College. I was so interested in it that I managed to meet all the players and with some of them I later became well acquainted. They were forced to cope with difficulties which would simply stop an American college team, used to high standards of equipment and plant, but they forgot all such lacks in the excitement of a fighting game whose spirit was as good as the best I ever saw. Almost all of them had odd and candid nicknames: *Franki* (for Frankenstein, because he was so ugly); *Changa* (Monkey, because he resembled one); *Manzanita* (Little Apple, because his face was round and red and shiny); *Ochi Chornya* (because he had some Russian blood); *Madame* (whose last name was Récamier); and *Flash*, a poor chap who was so slow that he had never quite made the first-string team though he tried hard every year.

The game ended in a 7-7 tie, the university team coming from behind to push the ball down the whole length of the field in the last three minutes of play. The crowd in the stands yelled itself hoarse and I honestly believe that those 7000 Mexicans thought they had had as exciting a Saturday afternoon as they could possibly hope for in the bull ring the next day. Attendance at the big games has grown, since 1941, to nine, ten, twelve thousand. If you are there in the football season, which is roughly the same as ours, you will give yourself an outstanding treat by watching our great American game as borrowed by a Latin neighbor.

Baseball is far less popular than football but it is gaining

every year and the quality of the game is quite as astonishingly good as is the quality of football. I watched a big game (for two pesos admission to the best section!) between the Patiño nine, of the capital, and the Jalisco nine of Guadalajara. It was good going every minute, and with the exceptions that the field was of dust instead of turf and that there was no fence over which a Mexican slugger could hope to knock the ball for a home run, it was startlingly like any good American game. The teams were of amateur standing, for "*beisbol*" is not organized in Mexico into professional leagues, but it looked like our professional ball-park games of the better bush-league quality. The umpire (*arbitro*) wore a blue serge suit and a cap twisted around backwards. Pop bottles were much in evidence and, of course, a few stronger bottles. There was a drunk (*boracho*) in the stands who made high comedy by insulting the umpire, by making numerous speeches, and by giving affectionate *abrazos* (embraces) to every man around him.

The players, from *el pitcher* to *el filder*, used the American baseball terms, even to the numerals, as did the umpire. "Strah-eeek one," he would bellow, and then "Strah-eeek two;" and if the pitched ball was wide or low or high he would shout "Balla balla." If the batter made a third strike he would roar his official *Out*. But if he finally connected and made a long hit that enabled him to circle the bases the crowd (assuming it to have been a batter of the home team) would drown out any futile words of *el arbitro* with its own delirious shouting of *Jonrón! Jonrón!* That you recognize, of course, as Home Run!

## D. HIPODROMO DE LAS AMERICAS

One of the least Mexican and most popular of sports attractions for the tourist is horse racing. It flourishes mightily in the Mexican capital, as it does in Rio, in Buenos Aires and in Santiago. Races generally take place on two week-day afternoons (at present Thursdays and Saturdays) and on Sunday noons—in order to be over well before the bull ring's demands at four o'clock. Tickets are, of course, on sale in the lobbies of the leading hotels and race talk fills the air on race days.

The track is rather far out in the fashionable perimeter of the city beyond the park of Chapultepec but it may be reached by the ordinary Paseo buses. Tourists who go to play the horses are, however, seldom so plebeian as to use them.

This track and its appurtenances make an ensemble of modern luxury, as one would expect, for the Jockey Club is its social temple and this remains the most exclusive club in Mexico as it has been since the Díaz decades when it occupied the Casa de los Azulejos (Sanborn's). Mexican racing is managed by an official Racing Commission rather than by a national code and the august members of this commission meet in the august club. It is possible to lose a good deal of money (despite the stern shadow of Cárdenas) at the Hippodrome of the Americas but it is possible also to see superb horseflesh in action and to enjoy, without pecuniary damage, one of the gayest and liveliest scenes in Mexico.

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## CHAPTER XII

### *Wonders of the City's Outer Belt*

#### A. THE SHRINE OF THE INDIAN MADONNA

THE church of the dusky Virgin of *Guadalupe* is a must on all tour programs because of the historic and romantic interest attached to her veneration. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on December 12, 1531, to an Indian named Juan Diego (John James) who stood on the hill called Tepeyac, a few miles outside Mexico City. Miraculously she left her likeness stamped on his *tilma* (mantle), a primitive garment of maguey fibre worn at that time over the shoulders and knotted in a manner quite different from the modern sarape. This tilma, with the miraculous image, is now guarded as a very sacred relic in the magnificent basilica which was erected two centuries later at the base of the hill. Originally Our Lady of Guadalupe was of Iberian and rather aristocratic quality in old Spain but her tender courtesy induced her to change her countenance and complexion. To Juan Diego, and to many millions of Indians since his day, she was an Indian Madonna, as any sacred portrait of her reveals. She was and is the national patroness of Mexico, for it was under her inspirational banner that Father Hidalgo rallied his ragged forces in 1810 for the War of Independence.

The suburb of the Mexican capital where the miracle occurred and where the shrine now stands came to be called

Guadalupe Hidalgo and any American schoolboy will recognize this name since it was given to the treaty by which our Mexican War came to an end in 1848. In Mexico's modern era the sacred suburb is officially and clumsily called *Villa Gustavo Madero* (he was the only revolutionary brother of Francisco) but the old name still lingers on in popular parlance.

The shrine of the Indians was long the most important pilgrim shrine in the western hemisphere and tremendous fiestas took place each year on December 12th, but Mexico's more or less agnostic Revolution dampened these celebrations and it is doubtful if they will ever again reach the old proportions, though the fiesta has recently come back to some extent. On the eve of the Great Day, I recently saw it, felt it, smelled it and it proved to be still—or again—quite overpowering, as it would be to any visitor from the States, unused to great hordes of primitive Indians. I saw one pious mestiza who was apparently kneeling her way—as many pilgrims formerly did—from the Zócalo to the basilica, a matter of *four long miles*. Her knees were horribly lacerated and bloody but she had at least half a mile yet to go. Indian watchers were continually throwing down garments in her path and I supposed it was from compassion, to soften the going. But no. I was informed that her knees were considered holy because of the torture inflicted on them and that any garment kneeled on by the pious woman would absorb holiness, along with a bit of blood, and would bring blessings to its owner.

The sights and smells in and around the great square before the basilica were of savage and kaleidoscopic color. Hundreds and hundreds of little booths were set up and from at least half of them lurid eatables and drinkables were being sold. Numerous carpas were in full blast and I dis-



covered that because of the Great Day and the crowds the admission price was doubled or trebled per act. I think I paid an entire dime for a single act in one tent. Its climax was a large and plushy *encantadora* who concluded each song by pulling a candy from her dimpled bosom and tossing it out into the audience. She danced, too, as a cow would dance, I thought, and the Indians loved it. They kept shouting something that sounded suspiciously like "Take it off, take it off," but she was only in a mildly teasing mood and took nothing off. In an adjoining tent I saw a *Gran Sensación: Fenómeno Humano: Pulpo Humano*. The poster outside had shown what Pulpo meant. It was an octopus; and the octopus had a human head, sure enough. The repulsive creature undulated in a glass tank and from its center emerged the head of an Indian girl. To entertain the audience the face smiled through the water and to add further to the general amazement the girl from time to time stuck out her tongue tauntingly. It was all a miracle in the eyes of the Indians, but not so great a miracle as Juan Diego's mantle, with the self-portrait of the Virgin painted on it.

This wonder, which is enshrined in the center of the basilica's high altar, is very real even to many devout Catholics of Mexico's more privileged classes. Highly educated persons have earnestly explained to me that the colors are obtainable from no known pigments and that it is utterly impossible for skeptical science to duplicate the luminous painting, especially the rays which the figure sends forth to right and left. And when efforts have been made to "touch up" the rays with fresh paint the tilma has steadfastly "rejected" the paint.

The picture is six feet long by two feet wide and is displayed on festival days behind thick plate glass in a frame of solid gold. Beneath the venerated object kneels Juan Diego

himself, sculptured in marble, and near him Bishop Zumárraga, who finally came to believe in the Indian and his story. The basilica is a grand and grandiose affair, worth seeing purely as a spectacle of religious construction. During the annual fiesta its nave is now enlivened by the flags of the twenty-one Americas. One of them, which I was solemnly assured was the flag of the United States, is composed of blue and white alternating bars and has numerous disordered stars—possibly forty-eight in all—reposing on a field of red! I gazed at it in some astonishment, for I had thought the Stars and Stripes rather well known in Mexico. Then I made my way out into bedlam, picking my path through many hundreds of Indians who were rolled up in their blankets and sleeping soundly on the stone floor just outside the portal. They were freshening up, I suppose, for bigger doings. The fireworks would start soon after midnight and would continue until dawn. There would be dancing in the square, too, hour after sacred hour, and then more worship in the basilica. They would not even think of starting on their toilsome homeward way until evening of the next day.

#### B. FLOATING THROUGH XOCHIMILCO

The floating gardens of Xochimilco (here the x is pronounced s) no longer float, as they actually did in earlier times, being man-made rafts of earth-covered reeds. They have been anchored by the lovely poplar trees which rise from them. The glamor of this world-celebrated suburb of Mexico City is authentic even when seen on Sunday, its fearfully over-crowded day. I may confess that I first visited the place in a strongly de-bunking mood, quite determined to be disappointed. A place talked about and written about

and photographed so incessantly must, I thought, have become a sheer tourist trap, a tedious sort of false-Venice, complete with guitars and flowers. Never has a mood of mine been more promptly and thoroughly shattered by the impact of reality. Xochimilco is full of tourists and guitars and soft-drink vendors and sarape vendors. It overflows with them; but one simply does not care. Its soft loveliness is so genuine, its romance so imperturbable and sure of itself, that it could hardly be spoiled even by a resort promoter.

The name Xochimilco means Place of Flowers and in this place humble gardeners grew them for the grandees of Tenochtitlán. The flowers are still so abundant that they dominate the whole scene. Some millions of them are offered for sale each Sunday and if you invest a peso you may buy a marvelous corsage of gardenias or enough carnations to decorate two or three rooms. The boats which are lined up at the wharf to take you on a canal trip are outlined in flowers, and their names, such as *Lolita*, *Juanita* and *Viva El Amor*, are solidly wrought in flowers. Marimba bands float by and beside you and Latin music fills the air, along with floral fragrance. The drink vendors and flower girls talk Aztec to each other and the dim mystery of this speech is entrancing, but they will sell their wares in any language, including one that they suppose to be American.

### C. PYRAMIDS LIKE MOUNTAINS

Mexico has at least six pre-conquest pyramids but by very far the largest is the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán, some thirty miles northeast of the capital. Its dimensions are exceedingly imposing, the nearly square base being 720 by 760 feet and the summit being 220 feet above the broad plain. In climbing it one is sharply reminded of the alti-

tude of the plateau from which it rises for one puffs like the well-known grampus, and this goes for youngsters as well as for not-so-youngsters. Nearby, to the north, is a smaller Pyramid of the Moon and in the opposite direction is *La Ciudadela* (Citadel), an amazing quadrangle of ancient masonry running a quarter of a mile in each direction and containing, among other treasures, a very remarkable Temple of Quetzalcoatl with numerous carved representations of the feathered serpent and of his symbol, the shell, so common also in Christian symbolism.

The vast structures of this whole *Zona Arqueológica*, as it is called, are all pre-Aztec. They are generally considered to be wholly or mostly Toltec, though some archeologists claim that at least the Sun Pyramid is very much more ancient than the Toltec era. Aside from the expert and intricate carvings, the outstanding interest of this Zone and of the lesser zone and pyramid of Tenayuca, nine miles north of the capital, lies in their revelation of the scientific attainments of the Toltecs. Their knowledge of structural "engineering" amazes all students of the epoch and their knowledge of astronomical measurements, so precise that they could figure exactly when the sun's rays would touch any given point on any given day of the year, fairly baffles the mind. In some respects they were far ahead of their contemporaries in Europe.

A period of crisis, from the religious angle, recurred every fifty-two years (1143; 1195; 1247; 1299) when the high priest of Quetzalcoatl mounted the pyramid and watched the Pleiades pass the zenith. When this transit had been accomplished in "safety" a huge beacon was lighted on the top of the chief temple and this signal was picked up by watchers on various hills who lighted similar beacons. Thus the good news was quite literally "flashed" throughout the country

that the favor of Quetzalcoatl could be expected for another fifty-two years.

The Mexican pyramids and their adjoining temples warrant unlimited study since they are of unlimited importance in the picture of American antiquity; but every casual visitor, even if he has seen the pyramids of Egypt, finds them exciting. And the simplicity of the business of seeing them, by means of an hour's pleasant motor trip, is not the least of their practical assets.

#### D. TOLUCA ARTS AND CRAFTS

Mexico's highest city (8760 feet) is not of special interest for itself but it is of interest—and most excitingly so to shoppers and bargain-hunters—because of the little villages surrounding it, villages where half the humble homes are devoted to the making of bright basketry, sarapes, cross-stitch bags and all sorts of embroidered articles for table use and for personal adornment. This is to some extent an Aguirre preserve for that agency is the only one, so far as I am aware, which features the arts and crafts villages of the Toluca Valley as one of its regular one-day tours from the capital. These villages are half lost in extensive meadows and marshes, and it is not practicable to see them without an experienced guide or a personal friend who knows his way. The spirit of the skilled workers is reflected by a tale which a craftsman named Pancho in the Santa Ana community told me. He said that the F. W. Woolworth Company once asked him to make or procure several thousand small straw mats of a type which would presumably sell fast in the States. Reluctantly he agreed to comply, but insisted that the price for so many would have to be higher rather than lower *per piece*. The dime store could not be made to

appreciate the typically Indian psychology of this and the deal finally fell through. "I get so *bored*," said Pancho firmly, "if I do the same thing so many times!"

Those travelers who prefer to visit Toluca "on their own" rather than on a guided tour may reasonably satisfy their bargaining instincts by browsing in the Toluca city market which is one of the liveliest in Mexico. Friday is a good day, but any day will do.

The motor approach to Toluca by Highway 4 (which is the famous Pacific Highway) over the lofty *col* (10,380 feet) at Las Cruces is enough in itself to justify the trip. It is magnificent in its variety of scenery and it offers several side trips of unusual character. One is to the *Desierto de los Leones* (Desert of the Lions), which is noteworthy for being no desert and having no lions (the name was a pun on a family named León). It contains gardens, cloisters and a curious underground labyrinth, once the retreat of allegedly convivial Carmelite monks. This is, however, a mere picnic ground (on Sundays and holidays) for metropolitan myriads. A far bolder trip is that to the summit of the Nevado de Toluca, an extinct volcano almost 15,000 feet in height, which dominates the Valley of Toluca from every angle. The Aztec name of this mountain is Xinantécatl, which means Naked Man, and a cold nudist he certainly is for snow crowns his rugged brow at all seasons of the year. There is a gravel road which leads to the rim of the volcano's crater and directly to the crystalline lakes of the Sun and Moon. This trip, made easily from Mexico City in a day (including the Toluca City visit), is vigorous rather than actually venturesome, and warm clothing is a necessity. It reminds the traveler once again that the advertising cliché is well within the truth when it proclaims Mexico the Land of Contrast.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Examining the Heart of Mexico*

MEXICO is a fifth larger than the combined areas of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, our four abutting states, but of its three-quarters of a million square miles some ten percent, surrounding the capital in all directions, contains ninety percent of all that attracts travelers. From the practical angle this in itself is interesting. It means that without undue exertion or expense the average man or woman can not merely "do Mexico" but can see enough of the country in a very few weeks to have a fairly adequate, if superficial, picture of it. If only two weeks are available one may logically devote one of them to the capital and the other to a single well-planned provincial trip.

Of these there are four of superlative quality, not counting the Pan-American Highway, which has possibly been used in reaching the capital. All four are *travel areas*, capable of being seen in a number of different ways according to taste, rather than mere rubber-stamp tours; and all are within the heart of Mexico, that ten percent of the country which is italicized in terms of travel. I shall assume that your eyes are now on a map as well as on this text, without bringing on permanent strabismus. The four major trips, or areas, shall be mentioned in the order in which they are to be treated in subsequent chapters.

1. *West to the Volcano and Guadalajara* (Chapters 14 and 15). The natural route is the remarkable Pacific Highway

(4) which leads through Toluca, Zitácuaro and Morelia. Beyond that city there is a short branch road to the lake and town of Pátzcuaro; and farther along the main stem there is another branch road that leads to Uruapan and the Volcano; and finally, after 422 of the most scenic miles in Mexican travel, the highway reaches the western metropolis of Guadalajara. Every mile of highway and branches is paved. A week is about the least time in which all of this can be enjoyably done.

2. *Northwest to the Towns of Independence* (Chapter 16). This is less simple than the first but no less rewarding, especially if romantic towns that were the sinews of Mexican Independence have special appeal. The chief of these towns are Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende and Guanajuato. They combine with lesser ones to form a glittering constellation of interest. They are much less known to *turismo* than are the westward towns because the highways are not so well developed and the train service is poor, but each has a good hotel and each is aglow with "personality."

3. *South to Cuernavaca, Taxco, Acapulco* (Chapter 17). This is the classic of Mexican provincial travel, the one that everybody looks on as a sheer necessity. And it is a necessity. All things considered—romance, beauty, variety, simplicity—it richly deserves the unrivaled popularity which it has won. The highway is paved all the way, which is 280 miles. And there are good planes that serve Acapulco, covering the trip from Mexico City in a hundred minutes, but the trick is to get a reservation. The planes are small and very popular.

4. *Southeast to Puebla, Oaxaca, Fortín* (Chapters 18 and 19). This is an area which can be seen in various travel combinations. All the goals can be comfortably reached by motor and the road to Oaxaca, as we have seen, is the advancing



Pan-American Highway. The distance from Mexico City, via Puebla, is 355 miles and all but about a quarter of it, at the far end, is already paved. (The road to Fortín is paved all the way.) There are various plane services, too, and a not-bad railway service, whose lines are partly electrified.

It should be repeated here that in 1944 a paved road was completed clear across Mexico from Guadalajara on the west to the Pan-American Highway on the east (at a point between Valles and Mante), making it practical and pleasant for the motorist who has reached the capital by way of the highway from Laredo to circle the heart of Mexico, finally returning by the northern portion of the same great artery.

The four main regions of interest mentioned above are packed by the travel agencies into neatly arranged tours, sometimes cramming two regions into a single week, and if you have no car of your own and do not wish to struggle with Mexican time tables you will presumably allow romance to be thus pre-digested. As a matter of fact the great majority of non-Spanish-speaking travelers do find it easier to let personal independence yield to professionally planned tours, but with the steady improvement of motoring conditions and with the enormous development of plane services, "impulsive travel" will gradually gain its great and thrilling place in the Mexican sun.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### *Westward to the Young Volcano*

#### A. THE LUXURY SPA OF SAN JOSE PURUA

*Mexico's Western Highway*, a paper-covered book published and distributed gratis by PEMEX, is one of the best propaganda books of travel I have ever encountered. With thirty-seven sectional road maps, four city plans, sixty or more illustrations, it enables one to follow intelligently every mile of the Pacific Highway and its branches. Eager to see what this would say about San José Purua, one of the most luxurious spas in Latin-America, I hunted up the reference and was astonished to read: "The hot springs . . . where there is a modest hotel, are widely known for their medicinal properties." All was explained when I discovered that the same publication omitted all mention of Parícutín Volcano. Both the volcano and the present spa were born about the same time, early in 1943, presumably just after the excellent book went to press.

San José Purua is a marvel of marvels, something straight out of a dream and quite impossible in any sort of actual world. Its popularity has been instant and enormous, so much so, in fact, that the hotel has scarcely advertised at all. I hunted up the manager and told him I was writing a book on Mexico and would most certainly mention his astonishing place. "Don't," he pleaded, to my great surprise, "or if you must mention it, don't say much. I'm already so over-

crowded all the time that I don't know what to do." Now I have done him a disservice and you a favor; but actually a great new ell has just been added and more additions are planned. Probably you will be able to get in by the time you visit the place, and if the tariff has not been raised you will pay thirty-five pesos (\$7.00) a day with meals—which are as good as the very best in Mexico.

The hotel, designed in a curious arc with a high bridge leading to the *comedor* (dining room), is located on a narrow shelf of land on the side of the extremely deep gorge of the Tuxpan River. To beautify the setting, and also for utilitarian reasons, the management has planted no less than fifteen thousand orange trees on the gorge-side, and along with these some coffee trees. There are two large swimming pools with warm radioactive water gushing into them all the time directly from the cliff. It oxidizes in the open air within a few minutes and turns to an odd *café au lait* color so that the pool is always brown. However, it is no whit less clean than any spring fresh from the earth, and the curative properties are said to be extremely potent.

The chief attraction of San José Purua for those who are not trying to cure something is the worship of the sun. Many decorative young things, and middle-aged and old things too, spend many hours of every day in their bathing suits on the well-lawned perimeters of the two pools, toasting in the sun and building up a tan that is several shades browner than the water and almost as brown as an Indian's skin. This sport is particularly popular in the bright winter days from December to March when every day is built to the sun god's order.

## B. COLONIAL CHARM IN OLD MORELIA

The approach to Morelia along the motor highway is beautified by wild flowers, wild birds and wild mountains. The latter reach their "thousand crests" in the panorama called *Mil Cumbres* which, as an individual spectacle, surpasses any one thing on the Pan-American Highway. At whatever time of day you pass this point you are certain to see cars in the little parking ground and mountain-gazers at the curving parapet. These thousand peaks compose some of the wildest country in Mexico and much of it is absolutely virgin. The largest scale map reveals no town or village names to the southwest because there are no towns and villages in this 300-mile stretch to the Pacific. Virtually nothing is known of it.

Among wild flowers the most insistent note, and a very pleasant one, is sounded by the flowering bush called pipirigayo. The blossoms are a luminous red and the five-syllable bush is a Mexican variety of myrtle. Tamer notes, but no less beautiful, are those of the peach and pear orchards, which are in bloom even in late January. The birds are colorful, too, especially cardinal birds and bluebirds, which are seen even in the thick-smoke country of the volcano far to the west.

Morelia, with two fine hotels—the colonial-inspired *Virrey de Mendoza* and the modernistic *Alameda*—is a lovely old-new city, capital of the State of Michoacán, whose regular abbreviation works out exactly like that of our Michigan. This is the native town of José María Morelos and proudly it changed its name—in 1822—from the original Valladolid to Morelia. Two relics of the patriot are shown to visitors, the House-Where-Morelos-Was-Born and the House-Where-

Morelos-Lived. The two are not the same house for the elemental reason that Morelos' mother was out when labor came upon her and she could not get home in time so she entered the nearest house she could find—and had her baby there. The actual Morelos house is now both a residence and a museum. An old lady who is the grandniece of the patriot lives there and quite naturally does not relish being disturbed at the wrong time. The hotel clerk will tell you the current hours of admission—as if he knew—and you may have the luck to get in. More than likely you can at any rate glimpse the bare main patio and the more appealing inner one. This latter was an open-air stable in Morelos' time and it is full of old-world charm. Moss is on the cobblestones and piety is in the air. Over the watering trough is a little statuette of the Virgin, for the simple priest who was to become a military genius sought to guard his horse from every evil that the devil could devise.

The charm of Morelia is a many-faceted thing. The bougainvilleas give off the brightest gleam and are almost dazzling in their lush brilliance, but many an old palace, church and convent soften the picture with a venerable patina that only centuries can give to old masonry. If you see some with gargoyles in the form of cannons pointing their muzzles out from the roof edge it indicates that these were the homes of conquistadores, for this was the arrogant symbol of those who conquered Mexico. And if you see above the cannons a row of bicuspid—as the toothsome architectural term has it—the symbol indicates a conqueror who was of noble lineage. A fine structure which has both is the State Library at the corner of the main street (Madero) and the little street called Nigromante.

When you enter the cathedral note the inner doors—six in all—of magnificent tooled leather, called *Cordobanes*; and

do not miss the quaintly conceived old painting back of the high altar which shows Christ ascending to heaven from a hill above Morelia! The town is plainly identifiable beneath the rising figure.

#### C. BY THE WATERS OF PATZCUARO

The branch road that leads from the highway at Quiroga in fifteen marvelous miles beside the Lake of Pátzcuaro to Pátzcuaro town is exciting all the way. It takes you first to Tzintzuntzan, which musical name is self-pronouncing, with the accent on the penult. This was the very ancient capital of the Tarascan Indians and their descendants are seen all about it and for many miles in both directions on the highway. You may recognize the women of the tribe from their heavily pleated red skirts which are said to require ten yards of material. You may recognize Tarascan names from the *tz* double consonant (as in the above name and also Pátzcuaro and Janitzio) which dominates their language as *x* dominates Aztec. And the sites of old towns you may recognize by the peculiar T-shaped stone temples called *yácatas*, with imposing rounded fronts. There is a good one on the hillside near the present village of Tzintzuntzan. The name Tarascan itself, since we are in their land, is not without interest. It means son-in-law! The story—and quite true—is that in early days the Indians, dazzled by the Spaniards' splendor, eagerly offered them their daughters in marriage and in so doing said repeatedly to the cavalier concerned, "Tarasca, Tarasca," as if to make the arrangement stick. The Spaniards, hearing the word so much and not aware of its meaning, called the Indians themselves Tarascans.

Pátzcuaro town, on high ground above the lake, is supposed to have been founded in 1324 by a Tarascan chief,

but its modern form is due in part to the civilizing labors of Bishop Don Pasco de Quiroga for whom the beautiful and sumptuous tourist inn (*Posada de Don Vasco*) is named. In the little town itself there is not much to see except the local prisoners in their jail. This fronts on the main plaza and you may see the jailbirds seated comfortably in their second floor "apartment" looking out on life. It must be jolly to be a prisoner in Pátzcuaro for you are in the center of social life and you can chat with passers-by and enjoy the band concerts from a box seat. When your wife or sweetheart passes she will toss cakes or candies or smokes up to you, as will any friend worthy of the name. You fare well and have even a sort of distinction, as though you were a dignitary dispensing wisdom from your dais.

In the midst of the gleaming lake of Pátzcuaro rises the island of Janitzio crowned by a huge statue of Morelos. I do not think in all my wanderings I have seen a more absurd affair than that statue, though it was perpetrated by one of Mexico's able sculptors, Guillermo Ruiz. The gossip is that the statue started out to be *colossal* but funds or material ran out and so the top part of the figure was, so to speak, *condensed*. From feet to waist the patriot-priest is of truly heroic proportions, but from his waist to the top of his head he is definitely dumpy and his right hand is very oddly cramped as though he had been in the act of making a gesture when he was caught by a rheumatic twinge and was forced to give up the idea. But the statue has its uses, for you may go to Janitzio by a much-coughing put-put that passes for a motor boat and climb to the monument and then to its summit for a superb view which you will always remember.

Janitzio, with its steep streets, its primitive ways and its strange butterfly nets for fishing, is a marvel of picturesque

ness and one regrets that it should have been made laughable by a well-meant ineptitude of art. The island has a most amazing story for it was the last stronghold of true Tarascan life and capitulated finally to civilization as recently as 1922. It is said that up to that time the islanders spoke *only* Tarascan and had picked up no Spanish at all, for they rarely left their island and they were dour and unfriendly to Mexican visitors. It was a case of exaggerated timidity but also the people of the island took pride in the fact that the conquerors had not yet conquered *them*. The Janitzians have a strangely Mongolian cast of countenance and until 1922 they seemed almost as remote from western civilization as if they were on a mountaintop in Tibet. They did not know the meaning of a bath. They did not even know coins and their uses. Then a boy from the island made his way to Pátzcuaro and worked for a Mexican family as house boy. The national government seized the opportunity to engage the young fellow as a sort of liaison officer. The authorities are said to have paid him two pesos a day to establish contact with his fellow-islanders and break down their hostility. In the end the plan was successful and all the islanders now speak more or less Spanish, not to mention a trace of English, for they have become decidedly tourist conscious and they now know very well—down to the tiniest Mongoloid tot—what coins are for!

#### D. URUAPAN IN A GRAY VEIL

Some sixty miles shy of Guadalajara a paved branch road strikes off from the Pacific Highway due south into the volcano country, reaching the city of Uruapan in forty-five miles. This has always been the Fire Belt of Mexico but since February, 1943, it has been the country of THE Vol-



cano, exciting the wonder of two worlds, the scientific one and the sightseeing one. Volcanoes are notoriously temperamental. For unpredictable moods and vagaries they outdo the traditional opera singer and for instability they surpass a Hollywood marriage. One who reports the performance of Parícutín can report only as of the moment of writing. By the time you reach this region the flaming mountain may be relatively quiescent and dull. And when your friends, disillusioned by your candid statement that the whole thing is a bust, have given up their intended visit, the volcano may be angrily awake again to refute your words. However, the consensus of scientific opinion seems to be that the impressive eruptions of Parícutín are from a "fire pocket" (known to science as a magma chamber) rather than from any deeper portion of the earth and that the volcano's life will be a short and merry one of very few years' duration rather than enduring in the manner of Vesuvius and Aetna.

I have just seen it and the show was the one most thrilling sight I have ever witnessed in my life. Uruapan, the tourist take-off, was conversely the dreariest city I have ever seen, but it may again be—within a few short weeks of this or any writing—the exuberant floral paradise which made it a traveler's Eden in former days. There are two or three little hotels in the city which have been doing "volcano-office" business, packed all the time and turning customers away in hundreds. It is rather necessary to make *sure* of a reservation well ahead and one of the most presentable hotels, with private shower baths adjoining many of the rooms, is the *Mirador*, directly on the first of three plazas which are oddly strung along from west to east. (*Hotel Progreso*, three blocks east, is of the same general standard.) This first plaza is called Jardín de los Mártires from a monument to heroes fallen in battle but the little park is itself martyred in these

days by the awful pall of lava ash which covers it like a gray funeral shroud despite the incessant efforts of the town sweepers. The monument, too, is martyred and looks grotesque in its thick murky robe of firedust.

A chief industry of Uruapan is lacquer ware and almost every traveler takes home some beautiful samples of it, chiefly trays, gourds and small boxes. It is, in a strictly literal sense, *lousy stuff*, for the lacquer is an oily gum made from plant lice called *axe* gathered by Indians during the rainy season. When applied to the desired article and when properly and quite interminably rubbed by patient hands to make it impermeable, this form of lacquer ware is exceedingly durable. The designs generally represent birds, animals and geometric figures of Chinese and Indian inspiration. A famous lacquer shop, hampered in these days by the endless ash-shower but stimulated by volcano-tourism, is found in the Avenida Emilio Carranza some two blocks west of the Martyrs' Garden.

#### E. THE MIGHTY FIRES OF PARICUTIN

Mexico's Huge Baby, christened Paricutín from the hamlet where it was born, has received more world publicity than any other in history, with the possible exception of the fabulous five-that-came-at-once, the "first successful Quints," of Callander. Paricutín is unique in being the *only* volcano born since science has reached an advanced stage where every cry, every tantrum and every shuddering tremor of the young hellion can be heard, watched and measured with accuracy. The baby has been photographed, too, not only by eager tourists with their movie cameras, but by scientific camera men for an hour-by-hour record and by skilled professionals representing the leading illustrated magazines. Of

a dozen such photograph-and-text records two of the most conspicuous and accessible, for those who would look them up, are to be found in the *National Geographic* for February, 1944, and *Life* for April 17, 1944. And one "made in Mexico," with such glamorous credit lines as *Fotos L. Palafox Robledo de la Legión Alpina de México*, was published in the first issue of *Revista México*, a slick-paper luxury venture which one hopes will remain a firm fixture in the firmament of travel. Look for this handsome quarterly, in its current issue, regardless of the first issue which featured the volcano. It is brought out under government aegis by *Editorial Piramide*.

Paricutín is so well known that it needs no introduction, and only the briefest refresher of facts. One Dionisio Pulido and his son were plowing their field for the spring planting of corn—than which nothing could be more Mexican—when his crude ox-drawn plow turned up a wisp of white smoke, and the startling vision was accompanied by odd rumbling sounds in the earth. The place was two miles outside the Michoacan village called Paricutín and the date was February 20, 1943. Father and son and even the stolid animal broke and ran, as from the devil. Pulido hastened to tell the priest of his own village and then the head man of Parangaricutiro, another village slightly more important and slightly farther distant. Everyone thought the man crazy but he had only to lead them to the spot and let them see for themselves. Within a matter of hours the wisp was a column of ash-dust and within a day there was a true volcanic cone thirty or forty feet high. A week later it was five times as high and a month later fifteen times as high. Despite some variations in intensity it has gone on with a persistent power that has puzzled geologists, for most such babies of Vulcan,

begotten in Mexico in past centuries, have died in infancy after a few weeks.

Some interesting findings reported to the *National Geographic's* investigator by Dr. William F. Foshag, curator of mineralogy of the Smithsonian Institution, who is a devoted student of Paricutín, are worth repeating here.

1. The magma chamber under Paricutín is perhaps 100 miles long, 100,000 years old. It is constantly seeking escape for its hard-pressed gases, and has at last found a good one in Pulido's cornfield.

2. The industry of Paricutín is phenomenal. It ejects 2700 tons of material a minute, enough, if it were steel, to build a heavy destroyer. In the first seven months the total material ejected came to two billion cubic yards, yet this loss was apparently unnoticed in the magma chamber below.

3. The vast luminous candle which rises more than half a mile above the crater's rim is not flame. It is a stream of incandescent lava bombs shot into the sky. Consequently the "smoke" is not smoke but a combination of steam and gas. Some of the lava bombs reach a height of 4100 feet, measured by the time they require in falling, namely sixteen seconds.

4. Red-hot lava a mile from its vent has been tested for heat and its temperature is about 2000° Fahrenheit. The thick, viscous material is probably only a little hotter than this as it comes out of the big cauldron.

5. The life expectancy of Paricutín is indeterminable. Other volcanic cones in the neighborhood have been short-lived. Dr. Foshag expresses the opinion that when Paricutín stops blowing off it will stop forever, but he does not assert this dogmatically.

6. The 35-mile diameter of desolation caused by Paricutín's smothering ash will not be a permanent blight. Both

lava and volcanic ash break down ultimately into fertile soil. It is, in the long run, a definite enricher of the earth—and that is good news for Dionisio Pulido's boy who may again plow fields within a mile or two of the old one. Mexican Indians have an almost fanatical feeling of attachment to the precise tierra of their childhood.

The traveler's trip from Uruapan to Paricutín must be arranged through the hotel management, unless one has come in a party on a managed tour. Only jeeps (of which there are none), flivvers and high-from-the-ground trucks can traverse the tough side road through the increasing ash drifts which are one to two feet thick as the courageous car toils on. In rutty going, with tempestuous heaving and tossing, your conveyance gains on the grim-glorious volcano and finally reaches the half-buried village of Parangaricutiro.

This village is the change-over place from car to horse or mule, where one hires an animal, presumably for six pesos, for the remainder of the trip. Parangaricutiro makes a tidy thing out of this traffic and no one would begrudge the stricken village this source of gain. Six pesos seems, in fact, far too little to pay for such a job of climbing but the animals are not good at trading and their owners seem to have found this figure the balancing point between supply and demand.

My *mulita*, a fine mouse-colored beast of rare ambition, insisted on taking the lead of the cavalcade in which I started one afternoon and presently I found myself far ahead, alone in a gray world that was silent save for the increasing rumble of the volcano. This rumble was like two sounds that do not, however, resemble each other. One is that of surf on a gravelly beach. The other is that of a heavy cart passing over cobblestones. Up and around and over and

through ash-dead fields and ruined forests for an hour or so the good gray mule carried me until we reached the end of the line. Then the animal stopped determinedly for she had finished her stint.

I was on a shoulder of ash-carpeted hillside perhaps half a mile from the volcano's cone and the sight was awe-ful. At intervals of a few seconds prodigious puffs of steam-ash burst from the crater as a gas bubble broke down below, and these seethed upward to join the great umbrella that filled half the sky. Each dark ascending pillar was intershot with myriads of "sparks" that glowed even in the daylight. These sparks were, of course, lava bombs two or three feet in diameter.

The greatest show on earth went on and on and on. I was so utterly enthralled by it that I scarcely noticed when my companions arrived; it seemed almost sacrilegious when someone suggested that we sample the sandwiches we had brought along from the hotel and try the coffee which an Indio was brewing for us in a nearby shack. Darkness settled slowly down and with every minute the show improved in spectacular effects. "Oh, oh! Look! And look at *that!*" Everybody was exclaiming and nobody felt apologetic about it for the sublime grandeur of the thing forbade correct and urbane small talk. When full darkness came Parícutín was at its incredible best, with rockets of every huge sort hurling their burdens of sparks upward with primitive, savage, unstoppable force. It seemed the perfect illustration for one half of the ancient riddle: What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? There was no immovable object unless it was the pull of gravity, which finally broke the force of even the most powerful bombs and dragged them back to the candent maw of mother earth.

At last we had to go back and it was like taking children

away from a circus. We looked back over our shoulders a hundred times, and I was sorry, on the return trek, that my mule insisted on being so speedy. As she took me into the forest, hidden from the volcano by a spur of the hill, the going became pitch-black but she minded it not at all. She plodded on, losing the path now and again but always finding it quickly.

At the *Mirador* in Uruapan that night my shower worked and the water was hot, two things of some note in a small provincial hostelry, and I was very glad, for hide and hair were saturated with fine ash. I found myself wishing for the city of Uruapan that it too could have a hot bath, of proper civic proportions. The need of it was very great.

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## CHAPTER XV

### *Glamor at Guadalajara*

#### A. DELIGHTS OF PLAZA AND PORTALES

MEXICO's second city, whose population approaches 200,000, is a sheer delight to the taker-of-things-easy. There is a lot to see but sights, as such, are not so exigent as in the capital. It is entirely defensible to do nothing except enjoy the placid life of the place, loafing in its plazas and devoting unhurried hours to shopping, actual or "window," under its numerous arcades. The Plaza Mayor of this city, with its cathedral and Government Building as beautiful ornaments and its leisured life as the main attraction, seems to me one of the two most thoroughly delightful plazas in Mexico, the other being in Oaxaca.

Guadalajara, named for the ancient Arabic town in Spain which originally spelled its name *Wad-al-hadjarah* (river-filled-with-rocks), is a rich, distinguished, erudite city but it is not a hard-driving city and one cannot quite imagine the brisk decree of "no siesta," imposed in 1944 upon the capital, ever being seriously applied here. The people of the well-to-do sort—and there are many—live well and dress well but they are in no rush to pile new wealth upon old. The women, by the way, are widely reported to be of special beauty. Many and many a city makes this claim in travel propaganda booklets but Guadalajara has, I think, no need to publicize such pulchritude. Take a seat in the plaza some



evening while the band is playing the waltzes that are always in vogue here and "look them over."

Hotels are good, though not of special luxury. Downtown—and the city is large enough so that it matters—there are two or three first-class places, the *Fénix*, the *Guadalajara* and the smaller *Virreinal*, all with tariffs not much more than half of those in the leading hotels of the capital. The *Fénix* is the chief tourist temple and it has an asset which is surprisingly rare in a country with Mexico's climate—a roof-garden dining room and cocktail terrace. Every meal and every snifter is a delight up there on the *altana*. The *Hotel del Parque*, uptown on the highway entrance to the city, is a natural hostelry for motorists. It is pleasantly modernistic in architecture and decoration. Guadalajara is no city for "eating around," except at the various hotel dining rooms; but one life-saving place calls for mention, since it will serve you at any time from 7 A.M. to midnight, as the hotel dining rooms will not. It is the *Copa de Leche* on the north side of the central thoroughfare named Avenida Juárez. The "Cup of Milk" is much more satisfying to a hearty appetite than the name would indicate. The restaurant is clean and of high grade.

If sightseeing is to find a place in your Guadalajara program you will surely include two things in your explorations—the *Palacio del Gobierno* (State Capitol) on the main plaza and the huge *Hospicio* looming up about eight blocks to the east of this. The Capitol is, as a matter of fact, almost inevitably visited, for in enjoying the plaza one automatically enjoys the building's superb façade, a typical example of churrigueresque, and then one strolls into the spacious patio. This patio is as beautiful as the façade. It is a two-tiered court with fine stone arches that are embellished with tezontle. Orozco is "all over the stairway" on walls and ceil-

ings and these paintings are among his most stentorian works. Survey Morelos as he surveys you from the ceiling of one of the stairways and see if you can avoid a sense as of shrinking away before that huge "patriot glare."

The Hospicio is a place to be measured in acres, and also, if you are in impressionable mood, in heartbeats, for human interest pulses high within the walls and in its twenty-five patios and flower gardens. It is an orphanage for several hundred homeless children and also it houses a girls' industrial school and a home for aged women. One of the old crones attached herself to me and showed me the Orozco murals (you knew, of course, that there would be some enormous ones here), but the heartthrobs were the children! Anyone who can watch them at play and at work without moistened eyes and tightened throat is sentimentally impermeable. One group of very young kiddies occupied an immaculate tiled patio and they lay in a circle on their backs looking up at the Guadalajara sky while a teacher sat in the center telling them patriot stories of Mexico. Another group was of six-year-old boys, each in a cranberry colored sweater, and these youngsters had been set to "swob down" a great tiled corridor. Each had a wet mop and they did their job with savage gusto and a great deal of horseplay. I saw one boy charge off at a mad tangent for a distance of twenty yards, using his mop as steed of battle. I suppose he was galloping down upon a company of Spanish royalists. Still another group of children, all under ten, composed an orchestra which was being led by an earnest maestro. The music was astonishingly good and I listened in amazement.

If you think an orphanage sounds dull try this one and see if it calls for a revision of the standard picture. Guadalajara is inordinately proud of her Hospicio and well she may be, for unfortunate children expand in its cheerful at-

mosphere like the flowers in its brilliant and innumerable gardens. Incidentally—and it really is incidental in this case—the view of the Hospicio from the center of the town and that of the town from the Hospicio form a two-way delight matched by few civic vistas in the whole republic.

#### B. TEMPTATION AT TLAQUEPAQUE

San Pedro Tlaquepaque (pronounced Tlah-kay-páh-kay) is a pottery-makers' suburb of Guadalajara and a place of relaxation for the city's multitudes as well as for the lesser tourist multitudes. It is only two and one-half miles from the center of the city so one may go by taxi, bus, trolley or even footwork, though the going on foot is dusty and unattractive.

Shoppers' fever rages in this little town for there are hundreds of good things to buy and about a dozen places where one may buy them. The word for pottery is *Alfarería* and one sees the product and the name on every hand but there are also many temptations in woodwork, textiles and fine embroideries. Two large places on the entrance thoroughfare are *Pedretti* and *Sahagen* but equally good if less conspicuous shops are numerous on the far side of the plaza. The one called *Tonal Art Store* is internationally known. Tlaquepaque is one of the chief provincial magnets for all those travelers to whom shopping is a major attraction of Mexico.

Open-air cafés abound and if they are far from fastidious they are at least lively, for itinerant mariachis are so numerous that their competing ballads drench the air with Latin rhythms. It is earthy and noisy and very pleasant in this potters' village. Mexico has a good time here and so will you.

## C. A DAY FOR LAKE CHAPALA

An easy and very scenic holiday from Guadalajara is that blue ribbon of Jalisco State which includes the *Salto de Juanacatlán* and the *Lago de Chapala*. The salto ("leap" or waterfall) is a Mexican Niagara which is actually the second in size of all waterfalls on the North American continent, being about 500 feet in width and seventy-five feet in height. One marvels that there can be this much water in Mexico but the answer is that Juanacatlán is formed by the Río Santiago which is the effluent of Lake Chapala. That lake is Mexico's largest, some four times greater in surface area than Switzerland's Lake Geneva.

Juanacatlán is reached by a five-mile road (not paved) branching to the east from the paved Chapala highway. The latter pushes on to the resort and lake (both called Chapala) some thirty-five miles distant from the city. There are good waterside hotels, and swimming, from a sandy beach, is to be had at all seasons of the year. I confess to being a Pátzcuaro partisan and I have not felt the same enthusiasm for Chapala, but the beauty of the larger lake is undeniable. Its shores lure artists and writers not only from Mexico but from foreign lands, which have fine lakes of their own.

There is hourly service of first-class buses from Guadalajara to Chapala at a round-trip fare of about a dollar, but whether you go by private car or bus you will eventually find yourself in a place that has a very familiar ring. Yes, it is the Zócalo! Little Chapala, somnolent beside its inland sea, has a central "socle" because once a monument in Mexico City remained unfinished.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Alluring Towns of Independence*

#### A. FREEDOM'S CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE state of Michoacán, with its capital Morelia, is the Morelos country of Mexican patriotism, but the abutting states of Querétaro and Guanajuato to the north are the actual *cradles of liberty* where the first cries were heard. Morelos did not enter the nursery of rebellion until things were already very lively. Dolores Hidalgo, where the first leader uttered the first *grito*, is not of interest except for its historical associations, but three towns that fought for liberty have such special allure that one would place them unhesitatingly among the most interesting and charming towns of all Mexico, yet no one of them has yet been much favored by tourists. They are Querétaro, San Miguel de Allende and Guanajuato. The first and last are capitals of their like-named states. San Miguel is in Guanajuato State, not far from the capital of its province.

Certain characters of the first ill-starred phase of the struggle—and most of these heroes were martyred within ten months—come into the story again and again and the towns of their fame are not to be fully enjoyed without keeping their names and their deeds ever clearly in mind. They have all been discussed in Chapter 5 but by way of recapitulation here is the cast of characters.

*La Corregidora*, the mayor's lady of Querétaro, was the

ugged patriot who sounded the alarm that saved the rebellion from being stillborn. Her Christian name was Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez.

*Ignacio Pérez* was the city jailer of Querétaro to whom La Corregidora signaled instructions. He carried the warning that the revolutionary plans had been discovered.

*Aldama* and *Jiménez* were officers who came into the rebellion with their friend Allende. To Aldama the warning message was given by Pérez when he could not at first find Allende.

*Ignacio Allende*, a dashing young officer of the Queen's Regiment, stationed in his native town of San Miguel, was a leading spirit in the Independence movement. He brought his regiment over to the rebel side.

*Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla* needs no introduction. This devoted but often bewildered village priest, heart and soul of the Independence struggle, was a man of noble character, and his motives were far loftier than those of the military men on whom he leaned. They thought of the whole thing as a military rebellion to win Mexican Independence from Spain. He thought of it as a social revolution as well, designed to bring not only Independence but justice for the oppressed. He fought for a democracy which should exist in Mexico under the nominal sovereignty of the king of Spain. He faced a firing squad on July 30, 1811, and died with the conviction that his cause had utterly failed. But it has been "gradually succeeding" ever since.

#### B. QUERETARO, BIRTHPLACE OF THE PLAN

The city of Querétaro is among the richest in interest in the Mexican republic and it lies on the main rail line which connects Mexico City with everything that is north and west

of it, including Guadalajara, El Paso, Monterrey and Laredo. The almost complete neglect of it by tourists is due, I suppose, to the poor rail service (the only real *rapidos* now stop here in the middle of the night—or whenever they arrive) and to the awkward highway connections. The only way to drive by an all-paved road at present is to use the Pan-American Highway north to Ixmiquilpan (105 miles from the capital) and then go west by a less good but paved road (55 miles) to the city. (There is also an all-weather dirt road from Morelia.) Mexico's road program, however, is really energetic and new or improved roads all through this historic and populous region are being pushed ahead with reassuring vigor. Inquiry at the time of your visit may reveal that a more direct approach to all the "towns of Independence" is already available.

The actual birthplace of the plan of Mexican Independence is the area in and immediately around Querétaro's Plaza Independencia. This is not, however, the center of the modern city's life, so it is well to get one's bearings before starting out in search of the past. The plaza which centers modern Querétaro eschews the customary names and calls itself Plaza Zenea in honor of a local celebrity. Here one finds the best hotel (*Gran Hotel*), the best shops, and almost everything that is lively. It is an appealing garden-plaza with the usual palms and splendid laurel trees, the usual benches and shine boys, the usual flirtation walk at band concert time, and in short the usual "restful animation" which obtains in all central plazas in Mexico.

A good city map, bought at a local *librería*, will be of special value in Querétaro for there is much to find and many of the old street names have been altered. The Square of Independence, in name and fact, lies two blocks east of Plaza Zenea. Near the southeast corner of it, at Number 14

on the street now called Calle Pasteur Sur (South), is the actual incubator of the plan. There is nothing at all to identify this famous structure—now a humble shop—but here met the dreaming patriots who so coolly called themselves an “art study club.”

On the north side of the square is the *Palacio Municipal*, being the very building where the Corregidor and his Corregidora dwelt. Both were earnest art students—in the strictly patriotic sense of plotting to throw off the hard yoke of Spain. The business affairs of the city are conducted here now, as they were in 1810, and I found it a bit difficult to view the actual quarters where La Corregidora lived; but persistence was rewarded and finally a city official relaxed to the point of calling his daughter and instructing her to show me the historic rooms. Only one phrase properly describes this girl. She was a cute number; and she wore a cute gray jacket with bright red pockets and red-bound buttonholes, a style much affected by young Queretareñas. I hope you will find her father (in an office at the southeast corner, ground floor) and then find her. She will not know much about history but you will not care. She will show you the exact spot on the floor where Doña Josefa tapped her signal to Jailer Pérez, the determined tap that touched off the fuse of rebellion.

This was by no means the only occasion on which Querétaro trod the stage of history. Here, in a building which is now a small sawmill (“Ortega,” at 29 Calle Hidalgo) the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified, for Querétaro was briefly the nominal capital of Mexico. Here, too, Emperor Maximilian made his last stand and was finally done to death in scenes so dramatic that they rival in interest the most vivid scenes of the birth of Independence.

It was at the insistence of Benito Juárez, that the emperor



paid the last penalty for "bearing arms against the government," and the penalty was exacted chiefly to teach Europe that it must not interfere. The man who had *been* the government and who was the symbol of foreign tyranny to liberty-loving Mexicans was executed on the *Cerro de las Campanas* (Hill of the Bells), just outside the city, on June 19, 1867. He was a personally gentle and kindly man and his last words were by no means the pious hypocritical screed they seem in a cold reading of them. "I forgive all," he said solemnly, "and I pray that all may forgive me. And I pray that my blood, about to be shed, will flow for the good of Mexico. *Viva México! Viva Independencia!*"

There is scarcely a more pathetic figure in all history than Maximilian of Austria who became Maximilian of Mexico. He was tricked by conscienceless Mexican reactionaries and by a conscienceless general of the French army of occupation into believing that the Mexican people had overwhelmingly voted for him as their ruler. Perceiving the trick too late, he was not strong-minded enough to leave Mexico in indignation so he carried on, trying to regenerate and liberalize the country of his adoption and trying also, though this scandalized his fellow monarchs in Europe, to introduce real democracy into his "empire." He honestly believed he was advancing that Independence which he hailed in his last spoken word.

Carlotta tried in her own high-spirited way to aid her husband in his ambitions. Both of them exercised astonishing tolerance and good sportsmanship, finding everything practically perfect in Mexico and bringing in the frequent phrase of "we Mexicans," which must have had an extraordinarily hollow ring to all who heard it. The empress broke her health on the impossible task of trying to secure aid in Europe for her husband and she went down into madness as

he went down before the firing squad.

The *Provincial Museum* of Querétaro, located since 1940 in a fine building adjoining the San Francisco Church on the Plaza Zenea, contains stirring souvenirs both of the Independence struggle and of the Maximilian interlude. One sees the very lock through whose spacious keyhole La Corregidora whispered final instructions to Ignacio Pérez and risked her life by so doing. And of Maximilian and Carlotta one sees many tragic memorials. There is the Capuchin Church clock, for instance, with its hands pointing to six o'clock, the exact hour of the morning when the emperor was shot. The clock was stopped in tribute to him by sympathetic clerics and has never been set going again. There are the original rude crosses which were first erected on the hill where the emperor and his two chief generals were shot. (Maximilian was given the chance to escape but refused unless they also could escape.) The crosses are simply lettered M. A.; M. M.; T. M. The last two are for General Miguel Miramón and General Tomás Mejía, but the first is wrongly lettered, at least as regards the wishes of the man whose place of execution it marked. M. A. stand for Maximilian of Austria but he passionately desired, even in death, to be considered Maximilian of MEXICO. Even had Mexicans desired this—and they certainly did not—the Hapsburg imperial line could hardly have countenanced it. Austria erected, in 1901, a showy \$10,000 chapel on the Hill of the Bells to mark the spot where a Hapsburg fell, but the body of the unfortunate emperor rests with those of his family line in the gloomy imperial vault of the Capuchin Church in Vienna.

The artistic appeal of Querétaro is quite as great as the historical and those who enjoy running down superb old buildings of the colonial period will be repaid for a week

spent in this city. Francisco Eduardo de Tresguerras ("Threewars") was the architectural genius of Querétaro, as he was of Celaya, his birthplace, and many another town in the Independence region. He has been called the most gifted architect ever produced by a Latin-American country and one of his Querétaro churches, that of Santa Rosa de Viterbo, is a magnificent architectural masterpiece. It may be emphasized here, for the benefit of those travelers who "do not bother with churches while on holiday," that if only two churches in the whole republic outside of the capital, are to be taken seriously as sightseeing specials, the two are inevitably Querétaro's Santa Rosa and Oaxaca's Santo Domingo.

Santa Rosa, on the narrow Calle of the same name in the southwestern quarter of the city, is constructed so that it flanks the street, sending flying buttresses almost to the very sidewalk. The roof balustrade and the dome and tower are most interesting but from the Calle Santa Rosa they cannot be seen, so the church should be approached from the north where several streets give something of a view, though not an unimpeded one. A close-up examination does, however, enable one to see comfortably a much more unusual feature, namely the two large faces, like theatrical masks, which look out from the outer curves of two inverted arches, these in turn being purely decorative ornaments attached to the flying buttresses. These faces are of Saracens, and they are Mexico's only examples of that rather un-Christian feature of various churches in southeastern Spain. They are a public and permanent vaunting of Christianity's military triumph over the Moors. But you will gaze at them with admiration just the same, for they are bold and original, like the mind of the great man who designed them. Tresguerras is supposed to have had virtually unlimited money for the decora-

tion of this church, money derived from government confiscation of rich caches of smuggled goods, and you can well believe the story when you see the interior. The churrigueresque lavishness of it surpasses anything else of the kind and the gold leaf is prodigally thick, but fortunately an artistic genius of the first rank controlled the outlay of wealth and the result is worth all that it cost—the smugglers. And do not neglect to see also the sacristy where a beautiful painting of a convent garden close by the same Tresguerras is the chief masterpiece. It is universally considered the greatest mural done in Mexico in colonial times. It is as opposite as possible to the art of Mexico's modern muralists but you will think its naïve pieties no less great in their field.

Tresguerras proved himself as able in secular architecture as in religious, as you may judge for yourself by entering the patio of the Government Palace (not the Municipal Palace). You will immediately see the very scene that is pictured on the back of twenty-peso notes and you will not wonder that Mexico has selected this beautiful courtyard as a decoration for its money.

A final Querétaro note will especially concern Californians. In the extreme eastern portion of the city, on the highest point of ground, is the *Plazuela de la Cruz*, dominated by the *Templo and Convento de la Cruz*. This was an early Franciscan stronghold and from it the earnest Franciscan friars set out southward to Nicaragua and northward to California to establish their chain of missions and to convert and civilize the Indians. Father Junípero Serra, the beloved pioneer who made his way to California and now rests in his own Mission Church in Carmel, the only Spanish-colonial to be honored with a statue as a "great American" in our National Hall of Fame in the Capitol rotunda in Wash-

ington, was one of these Querétaro friars. The rude cell where he prayed for the success of his venture is pointed out to visitors.

#### C. SAN MIGUEL, A PATRIOT'S HEARTH

A graded road which is quite practicable in Mexico's dry winter, but which calls for inquiry in summer, now connects Querétaro and San Miguel (and Guanajuato) and both cities lie also on the direct rail line leading to Monterrey and Laredo. The distance between them is but fifty miles. The day train asks two hours to negotiate this distance and generally takes much longer than that. If you visit the Independence towns by train be advised of the simple way to handle railway schedules. Pay little or no attention to the time-table but merely ask your hotel porter to call up the station now and then and to let you know an hour before the train is actually expected. When he does so take the full hour for sightseeing or whatever you feel like doing and then start to get ready to go. You will still reach the station long before the train does. And having finally entered the train, you will wait in it for a good half hour before it suddenly starts, with a grand jerk unheralded by any whistle or other apparent signal. It is my sincere hope that a very great improvement in rail service will soon make a liar of me, but it has been for years the way I describe it. No informed traveler dreams of going to the station at any given time merely because the time-table suggests that a train is due.

San Miguel, which tacked on the name Allende in honor of its native patriot, is one of the picture towns of Mexico. It is not officially called a "National Monument" in the same sense that Taxco is so called, and in the sense that

France made Mont-St.-Michel a National Monument of that country, but nevertheless much care is taken to prevent its appearance from being spoiled. This means that no new construction and no structural alterations to existing buildings or homes may be undertaken without due authority. Architectural harmony is to be maintained even at the cost of commercial gain or personal convenience.

San Miguel is a jewel of unspoiled Spanish-colonial aristocracy for it was the home of many pedigreed families who had extracted wealth from the Guanajuato mines. A steep road leads up to the central plaza of the town and reaching this center from the railway station is no simple matter for taxis are few and dilapidated. If these fail to appear you will be able to wedge yourself into the public bus, presumably an ailing Ford. You will find yourself one of some sixty passengers in a conveyance meant for twenty. But when you reach the main plaza you will quickly forgive all sins of Mexican transportation for the sight is a picture of romance.

The central hotel, *Posada de San Francisco*, strikes just the right note for it is a new structure in the colonial style with two patios, fountained and flowered in exquisite taste. Its rooms are modern, with private baths, its table fare is good, and its location, directly on the plaza, is decidedly convenient in so up and down a town. There is another inn, even more beautiful and romantic but on low ground at the edge of the town, called *La Granja Santa Mónica*.

Across the central plaza from the posada is an astonishing church inevitably named San Miguel. Sylvester Baxter called it "Gothesque" and perhaps that manufactured word is as good as any. It was the grandiose effort of a local architect who had more ambition than artistic knowledge yet it by no means spoils the town. Its oddity, with a wide straddling tower cutting sharp lines against the sky, is a positive en-

hancement rather than a defect and as the rays of an early sun stream upon and through it, illumining its pink stone, the effect is glorious. Ceferino Gutiérrez, who did this, did many other things for his own town and averaged very well indeed.

The home of Ignacio Allende is at the corner of the plaza, with an appropriate tablet to identify it. The old street that runs past this building is called Lane of the Cradle of Allende (Calleja de la Cuna de Allende). Aldama's house is also on the main plaza, one corner away from Allende's.

Walking in this steep town at an altitude of 6000 feet may tax your "bellows" but it will tax your supply of adjectives, too, for every vista is lovelier than the last. Little rivers flow through most streets, from the abundant springs on the hillside above (called Cerro del Chorro—"Hill of Springs"), and they lend a freshness to the whole atmosphere as well as a brisk obligato to the normal sounds of small town life. One walk—and it is only one of many—I would stress for its great rewards. Go up hill from the plaza by Calle de Correo (Post Office Street) and you will see straight ahead of you a *campanario* with four bells, in a horizontal row, silhouetted against the sky. Turn right at the bells and go for half a block until you find a rough boulder-strewn street ascending the cerro steeply. Climb this (slowly) and you will find yourself at the top of the world, with the whole of San Miguel spread out below you. From this superb natural belvedere look down and pick out whatever you wish to find for the town is like a map on a great table. There is, for instance, in the right mid-distance, the enormous Basilica San Felipe Neri, with fine old cypresses accentuating its venerable charm. And there is the lively town market, close by Neri; and the bull ring in quite another quarter; and in the distance the arty vignette of the

village of Atotonilco.

But the map is yours and you will make your own selections without much help from anyone. This is a town where you cannot make a mistake, for whatever you do or fail to do will work out just right. With the whole of San Miguel a lovely monument to the past it matters little what details compose it.

#### D. GUANAJUATO SILVER

Guanajuato is considered by many to be a true rival in picturesqueness of that other old town of silver, Taxco. I would not go quite so far but it is at least a good second, in setting and in romantic appearance, and it has the advantage over Taxco—so far—of being relatively undiscovered by tourists. The name is Tarascan for “Frog Hill” but it actually occupies a deep cleft between two hills and ambitiously climbs their very steep sides. Formerly this cleft contained a river and the river occasionally went wild with floods, wrecking the town and drowning scores of inhabitants; but it was finally tamed and more or less obliterated by means of an expensive tunnel to divert the waters.

The central plaza is Mexico in miniature, with a special heritage of Andalusia (whence came some of the early settlers) and with a somewhat incongruous touch of classicism in the imposing modern Juárez Theatre with its columned portico. The congested square is called Plaza Mayor but it should rather be called Plaza Menor for it is certainly the smallest central square (actually a curious triangle) of any city in the republic. Space is at a great premium in the narrow valley and this is all that could be eked out. But life goes on marvelously here and the flirtation walk at dusk, with a moon peering over the hillcrest and a band playing



popular airs, is like something out of an operetta. So small is the space for walking that the señoritas are often quite inadvertently bumped by the young caballeros; but this gives a chance for a handsome apology and a charming acceptance of it, all done with the proper proportions of admiration and confusion.

Two good hotels form an arc on a curve of this plaza. The *Posada de Santa Fe* is the newest and best, but the older *Luna* is a close rival. They bring to a focus all the transient life of the town.

Guanajuato was a conspicuous center of activity in the wars of Independence and its grim old granary, Alhóndiga de Granaditas, has been mentioned as a scene of heroism and tragedy. In this huge pile of masonry the royalist troops took refuge in September, 1810, only a few days after Hidalgo had uttered his Cry. The rebels stormed the place but could not force their way in. On September 28th, a young Indio named José Barajas and nicknamed Pípila undertook to make a solo attack against the great main door under a murderous hail of assorted missiles. He was successful and smashed it in. A terrible slaughter ensued and a few days later this was capped by a mass lynching in which the town mob killed about 250 royalist prisoners who were being held, unarmed, in the massive structure. In a counter wave the royalists recaptured Guanajuato and murdered all the citizens—men, women and children—whom they had captured in the attack. And a few months later, piling brutality upon brutality, the royalists—as we have noted earlier—brought the severed heads of the four slain leaders, including that of Hidalgo, and callously fixed them upon hooks on the four corners of the Alhóndiga, where they remained for a gruesome decade.

Pípila is the town's personal hero of Independence. A

statue of him, with a decidedly silly moustache of real hair superimposed, stands in the hallway of the Alhóndiga; and another statue, of huge proportions, showing the Indio in the act of charging the Granary, has been erected on the crest of one of the hills, immediately overhanging the Plaza Mayor.

Guanajuato strolls, unguided by any cicerone, are of unending delight. You will surely find the pretty Jardín de la Unión and you will probably find, around-the-corner-and-up from the hotels, the Compañía Church (for "Company" of Jesus; hence, Jesuit, as everywhere in Spain and in Spanish America). It is identifiable by the four tall cypresses which rise from an elevated parapet fronting a tiny plazuela and seem fairly to pierce the sky with their thin green shafts. You may find Kiss Alley (Callejón del Beso) so named because of its narrowness, fancifully enabling the houses, not to mention their residents, to kiss across it. And if you wander to the hilltops you may even find the Catacombs, with their horribly realistic mummies lined up against the walls. The rich men of this rich town have nice graves, kept inviolate for all time, but the poor have only *leases* and must be exhumed when the leases expire. The exceedingly dry air of the heights has sufficient embalming quality to preserve their bodies in ghastly "naturalness."

Three miles from the center, if your wanderings take you that far, you may find the extremely rich Valenciana silver mine and its church (San Cayetano) built by the Conde de Rul. According to a splendid legend, suitable to the town's traditions, the supporting mortar was made of powdered silver moistened with fine Spanish wines. If this is a bit fanciful it is at least a fact of history that the count built the very lavish edifice with peon labor which was almost slave labor (six centavos a day wages but no payment for religious

holidays, though full work was expected). And it is a fact that he demanded from each miner a weekly *piedra de mano* (fist-sized chunk of silver ore) as religious tribute for the upkeep of the church's pompous ritual. There was something less than noble in Rul's attitude and the story of this Valenciana Church, one of the great curiosities of Mexico, is worth keeping in mind for purposes of comparison when you see the church of that other silver plutocrat, Borda of Taxco.

Guanajuato silver has made this amazing town what it is; and isolation has kept it what it is. You may have a hard time reaching it, presumably by a circuitous and difficult train route with poor connections, or by a dubious road, but if you spur yourself to do it fairly soon you will get there "ahead of the pack." Good roads are "creeping up" on it from several directions and some day it will be another Mecca for tourist thousands. Then it will indeed be another Taxco, at least in terms of popularity.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### *The Sirens of the South*

#### A. THE CALL OF CUERNAVACA

CUERNAVACA—Taxco—Acapulco, the Three Graces of Mexican tourism, are generally seen in a chain of ecstatic travel by those who drive a car of their own or who elect to hire one in Mexico City. But it is a long haul to Acapulco (287 miles) and many travelers make an overnight round trip as far as Taxco only (102 miles), with a halt one or both ways at Cuernavaca; and then fly from the capital's airport to Acapulco. Cuernavaca is but forty-seven miles from the capital and some Mexican business men of means live in this garden city the year around and think nothing of commuting daily to Mexico City. For those who wish to save the expense of hiring a car there are speedy little jitneys that make the trip in eighty minutes on a half-hourly schedule. There are buses to Taxco, too, and even to Acapulco, and they are called "first-class"—which means at least that they sell only as many tickets per trip as there are seats for reservations. The going is not too hard and the saving in money is substantial, especially if you are only one or two persons. If you wish to look into it you will do well to hunt up the bus company's main office, for your hotel porter will scarcely have heard of these buses. He will consider them unworthy of your standing in his community. The bus office is on the short street called Netzahualcoyotl just east of Av. 20 de

Noviembre. Reservations for the *outward* trip are easy to secure, and likewise for the return trip from Cuernavaca (at 1 Plaza Morelos), but to secure return reservations from Taxco or Acapulco you will have an exhausting struggle.

Cuernavaca is a much-loved residential town whose history is as romantic as its present appearance. Being 3000 feet lower in altitude than the capital, its climate is semi-tropical and its floral luxuriance beyond description. There are glorious twin plazas in the center of the town, named for Morelos and Juárez, and you may live directly on the former at the first class *Hotel Marik*, which has as added lure a dining room with a beautiful valley view. A rather more pretentious hotel a bit outside the town is the *Chula Vista* and still another fine place is *Hotel de la Selva*. Both of these have outdoor swimming pools and all the trappings of sport, and both are brilliantly bowered in flowers. Hibiscus, vast masses of purple and rose bougainvillea, and scarlet and even yellow poinsettias dominate the show, but a specialty of Hotel de la Selva is its fine magenta-and-white passion flowers. These are named for the Lord's Passion and the origin of the name is interesting. The corolla forms a perfect crown (of "thorns") and from it emerge three "nails" (stamens) which pious folk consider to represent the spikes that nailed Christ to the cross.

Cuernavaca is the capital of Morelos State. Its name means "Cow's Horn" but this was merely the conquistadores' lazy way of saying Cuauhnahuac, the Indians' word for "Beside the Woods." A more luxuriant setting for a town can hardly be found or imagined anywhere than this of Cuernavaca. No wonder Cortés loved it and built here his palace in the country. No wonder Borda loved it and spent his millions building here his own Versailles—but definitely without showiness. No wonder ambassadors have loved it, including

Dwight Morrow, and have made it their Mexico home. No wonder Mexico City's privileged thousands and you and I and all other travelers love it.

The Cortés Palace, now used for the state legislative offices, is the center of the city; its lofty loggia, with the Rivera frescoes, the gift which Dwight Morrow presented to the people of Cuernavaca, is the center of the palace, so far as visitors are concerned. This great mural is typical of the artist, including his ruddy bias and his savagery toward Privilege and toward the Church. Typical of his social sentiments is the portion of the picture which portrays Indians being branded with red-hot irons to indicate whose property they were; and typical of his sentiments toward the Church are the ghastly representations of "human sacrifice" as practiced by the Aztecs, shown at one end of the loggia, and the similar "human sacrifice" practiced by the Holy Inquisition, shown at the other end. Both are made to seem equally horrible and perhaps they were, though certainly the scale of the Aztec slaughters was a thousandfold greater.

Interesting anecdotes of the conquest are shown, including Cortés' dismantling (not burning) of the boats at Vera Cruz; and interesting persons include Bartolomé de las Casas and, of course, La Malinche. From conspicuous points on either side of the loggia Morelos and Zapata gaze earnestly at us, and Morelos' eyes follow us strangely wherever we go.

A technical effect is invoked by Rivera to dramatize his splendid preaching. At the north end of the mural, where the historical narrative commences and where capitalistic and ecclesiastical greed are at their worst, the colors are very sombre indeed. The effect softens gradually as the picture moves along until finally the bright Social Revolution bursts through triumphantly. Zapata is the key figure of this wondrous change since his operations were chiefly in the Cuer-

navaca region and farther south. He is clad in dazzling white and he rides a white horse. The skies over him are as blue as Cuernavaca's own.

This town, if we may exploit the Spanish reflexive so commonly encountered, "sees itself" and "enjoys itself." You will hardly have difficulty in finding the things that need seeing and enjoying, but it will be a practical aid if you find (perhaps in Hotel Marik's lobby) the Tourist Association's brochure called simply *Cuernavaca*. Its text is enlivened with beautiful illustrations and its endpapers are a city plan and a regional map.

Your strolls will inevitably include the dreamy Borda Gardens with their mirror pools; the cathedral and its adjoining Third Order Church, both of Franciscan origin; the Morrow home, *Casa Mañana*, where the ambassador lived with his family and where Charles Lindbergh courted Anne. This is on Calle Dwight Morrow and at the extreme end of it rises the Tepetate Chapel framed by two cypress sentinels. The Tepetate Chapel, always associated with Mrs. Morrow because of her affection for it, is one of the loveliest "artist's bits" in Mexico.

On a warm afternoon I found a seat in the humble *Salón Ofelia* on the Plaza Morelos, chiefly because it is far more shady at that time of day than the Marik's porch, but partly in tribute to a book about Mexico. I refer to Gertrude Diamant's *The Days of Ofelia* which has not been surpassed for charm nor for its sympathetic view of Mexico's "lower brackets." As I watched the life of the plaza I saw many a potential Ofelia and many an Eduardo, but the touch that seemed to me most agreeably typical of Indian Mexico, though not mentioned in the book, was the row of evangelistas. In this city they have made their "office" on the plaza's pavement. I watched the Cuernavaca scribes as I had watched others in

other cities, as they sat patiently behind their typewriters, waiting for business, and finally one of them landed a client. He was a diffident cocoa-skinned youth and evidently found it most difficult to start dictating his letter. Finally he plucked up courage and the words came. Of course, I was for him all the way, hoping hard that he was not as nervous as he looked and that he would not forget to put in lots of *abrazos* and *besos*. It would be perfectly safe to do so. The wooden-faced scribe would not be beguiled into any show of mockery for he was in much the same position as a father confessor in his confessional box; and, furthermore, a client is a client.

#### B. TAXCO THE INCOMPARABLE

Whatever places you miss in central Mexico, including the capital itself, do not miss Taxco! Its romance is true, its beauty *total*. In an article called *Taxco Done in Silver*, written on the spot when I first visited the town some years ago, I burst into such an enthusiastic panegyric that I was almost ashamed to send the piece to any editor, lest it seem over-excited—but it was printed without setting the pages afire. I called this town the absolute equal of any hill town in France or Italy and that statement I have never desired to take back. Knowing all the chief European hill towns, I am in a position to do my personal comparing and I still feel that this treasure of Mexico is as good as the very best in the Old World.

Taxco (correctly pronounced Tasco) is officially a "National Monument," protected by the federal government, and it is zealously supervised, in this respect, by federal architects. Every home and every business building in the town has—and must have—a red-tiled roof and this law alone adds measureless beauty to the place. Survey in certain other po-



tentially pretty towns the hit-or-miss roofs, some of tile, some of concrete, some even of rusty metal, and then feast your eyes on Taxco.

Cortés was the founder of this town but Borda, originally Joseph le Borde, born of Spanish parents in the French city of Toulon, was the man who really built it. His horse is supposed to have sunk a hoof in soft ore which proved to be an outcropping of a vein of silver. This became the fabulous San Carlos vein and on the exact spot where the horse was so richly trapped the cathedral ultimately rose. "God gives to Borda and Borda gives to God" is the much-worn saying. The eighteenth century millionaire did at any rate suit the action to the aphorism by building in twenty years the sumptuous cathedral which dominates the whole region. It is supposed to have cost ten million pesos and these were Borda's pesos, though doubtless they were sweated from humble laborers in the manner of the times. The material of the church, which gives forth a wonderfully warm glow, is a pink rock called *cantera* and the chiseling of it, especially in the façade and the tall slender towers, is as delicate as though the whole church were a *châsse* intended to house a saint's remains.

The inside is of very handsome churrigueresque adornment with much gold leaf and with the Quetzalcoatl-Christian symbol of the shell constantly recurring. It will be noted that the images of Christ in agony always show plenty of *blood*. This was for the simplest of reasons. The Indians have always understood blood and what it means to shed it. They could and still can read these images like open books. The paintings, as against the decorations, were all done by the great Miguel Cabrera, whose blues and reds some Mexican critics consider unique in the field of art.

Silver made Taxco and silver still forms the dominant

motif of business, but in these days relatively little ore is mined—except from the pockets of tourists. Numerous shops—two of the best known being those of Spratling and Los Castillo—sell pins and brooches and silver ornaments of every kind, wrought by the hands of local artisans. Many of the items are exquisite and temptation demolishes the last vestige of sales resistance. Taxco urchins, all of whom speak tourist American of the most fluent if limited sort (“What’s cookin’, sir?” and “That’s the real McCoy, lady.”), appoint themselves as cicerones and drag the unresisting shoppers here and there. My self-appointed guide on one occasion was a most charming youngster of eleven supporting the name of Jesus German, which loses its comic aspect if one dresses it up with accents and pronounces it in Spanish.

To watch the artisans, as one may do in either of the above-named establishments, is a sheer fascination. William Spratling’s *Taller de las Delicias*, at the corner of the Zócalo directly opposite the cathedral, is the handier of the two and also the larger. About three hundred persons are employed by Spratling’s and most of them work on silver, though some devote themselves to woodworking and fine cabinetry and some to ornamental objects of tin when satisfactory tin is to be had. Mexican silver, the chief material of the Taller (which word will be recognized as the Spanish cousin to Atelier) is seen in great bars and it is of such purity that it is far too soft for use. An alloy to the modest extent of two percent must be mixed with it to make it sufficiently hard. The artisans often start learning their craft when they are mere boys but in time they become finished craftsmen and then teachers of new and newer “classes.”

An oddly shaped basement room with only one tiny window and with a very heavily barred door is used as a storage

vault but it looks like a medieval jail cell and perhaps it was exactly that, for this house of Spratling's was once the home of Borda's father-in-law and it is thought likely that persons whom the silver family considered dangerous were kept here in personal "protective custody." Perhaps there are other secret dungeons in Borda's own house, which is on the north side of the Zócalo.

Above the cathedral the town climbs hundreds of feet, and below it the town falls away other hundreds, but the house that Borda built for God (in return for the mining concession) is the center of everything. The plaza from which it rises is even the center of un-churchly revelry—of a most innocuous sort—for here is Paco's Bar, with a straight-on view of the cathedral towers that surely no other bar in the world can match for romance; and here, too, is the original Bertha's tiny café-bar. Bertha has won the distinction of being written up in such sophisticated publications as *Esquire*. She has made substantial money to match her international fame. But to look at her shop and herself you would think her an ordinary bar-matron struggling valiantly to support her family. She goes to church with undiminished faithfulness, as you may see almost any morning, but every evening you will see that she has substituted spirituous for spiritual duties. She mixes her tall cool Berthas personally. Success seems not to have altered her stern simplicity. Her little "night club" is so very humble that fastidious tourists sometimes hesitate to enter it, but it is the life of the Taxco evening, the rendezvous of spontaneous Latin songs, the tin trumpet of the Silver Symphony.

I have saved to the last my mention of Taxco hotels for they are a distinguished company. They are "sights" in themselves and each one has a view that you will swear sur-

passes all the others. In the upper town are three.

*Rancho Telva* is the Wells Fargo hotel, with a very lovely string of terrace gardens virtually roofed completely by brilliant bougainvilleas.

*Victoria*, managed by Americans who serve good American food, including pie, is conspicuous on the hillside just above the center of town. Its dachshunds, Chiquita and Lord Eustace, and its polychrome parrots which sing, whistle, orate and giggle by turns, may possibly have gone the way of all dogs and parrots by the time you reach Taxco, but the glorious view will certainly remain.

*Sierra Madre*, a lift lower in location and a bracket lower in tariff, has a homey atmosphere and a broad open roof that sits just under the stars.

*Los Arcos* is below the Zócalo, above the lovely Casa Humboldt, where the great German naturalist-explorer lived—and you will envy him.

*De La Borda*, a swanky hostelry on a knoll at the base of the town, is the favorite of Mexico City society and one readily sees why.

*Posada de la Misión* (Mission Inn) is the newest of the company and the town's modern cinema is beside it. The history of the buildings is curious for both were designed and built by a Mexican girl of twenty-one who has owned them from the outset. She has perhaps reached the vast age of a quarter of a century and if you see, perched on a chair at the reception desk, a person who looks like a starlet of the Mexican screen, it will doubtless be Elena Razó, author and owner of the sumptuous ensemble.

For convenience in making short strolls from Taxco's Zócalo-cathedral center, the upper hotels are recommendable, but those who drive their own cars often prefer the lower ones because they are on the main highway. From

considerations of view I am inclined to vote for the Misión for two reasons: First, the whole town hangs before the eyes like an incredible tapestry, red of hue by day from the innumerable tiled roofs, a banner of scintillant lights by night. And second, there is the thrilling outlook from the tiny shrine in the rear of the inn. You naturally assume that you are on very low ground at the Mission Inn, with Taxco high above; but no—you are still a mile above sea level. As you sit on the parapet behind this shrine you feel that you are on the edge of the bottom of the world. You look straight down at the twisting ribbon of the road that leads to Iguala and Acapulco. And you look down far below that to a hamlet in a deep ravine where life goes on even as it does at your level and in the loftier levels of the town. The activities of that hamlet are on the same scale in your eyes as are your activities in the eyes of the plane pilot who cuts a path in the cobalt sky a thousand feet above you. Taxco is like that—a vertical town where every prospect pleases. It is romance itself, done in stone and tile and dazzling plaster and bougainvillea and birds. As Shakespeare puts it: The soul that hath no Taxco in himself— But you and I *have*.

#### C. ACAPULCO IN HER BATHING SUIT

Acapulco looks wonderfully well in her bathing suit. She is as beautiful as any of her most favored rivals in the old or new world and if she is a "warm number" she is certainly neither torrid nor sultry. Her temperament, moreover, is amazingly even and you need look for no storms nor tantrums nor even many clouds to shadow her lovely serenity.

To retreat from this risky metaphor and find a place to stay in Mexico's most popular resort is a practical necessity and a poser, too, for during many months of the winter,

when Acapulco's magnetism is at its strongest, all good and medium accommodations are likely to be booked for several weeks ahead. Hotel prices have mounted with popularity and there is nothing inexpensive here even in dollars—but no one cares too much about that. The thing is to get a decent room—somewhere, anywhere—and forget costs. This you can probably achieve by being very forehanded and making your reservation even before you leave the States.

*Los Flamingos*, high on a cliff above the crinkled Pacific on one side and above the road on the other, is perhaps the first choice, partly for its bold location. Trade winds from the sea sweep gently up and *through* your cliffside cabin and also through the dining room and bar which sit so high on the saddle that even the gentlest breeze cools them. The place is luxuriously casual and you may enjoy everything, including good meals, in slacks or shorts or even in a bathing suit.

*El Mirador*, located in La Quebrada, a *ravine* of the Pacific cliffs as the name of the section announces, is another place of much the same calibre, but not, I think, quite so cool. Nor are its bar and dining room so well located for they are in a pocket of the cliff rather than on its saddle. From the rocks just below this inn the brown boys who dive from dizzy heights into the seething swirl below are the major spectacle of Acapulco. It stops your breath to watch them and the danger is not entirely fictitious. It has happened that reckless or careless boys have dived from La Quebrada's cliffs straight into eternity.

*Papagayo* (Parrot) is a very large first-class hotel of more Mexican patronage than the others, and it is the only major hotel of Acapulco located squarely on a beach (Los Hornos). From the others you must take a taxi to any of the beaches. To offset this great advantage of the Papagayo one must

mention that flying insects like the low ground much better than they like the cliffs.

*Del Monte, Los Hornos* and numerous other small but good inns are available; and for motorists *Las Palmas Courts* may be mentioned as first-class.

There are three chief beaches. *La Caletilla* (Little Cove; called also *La Caleta*), its perfect crescent split and dominated by the island castle of President Avila Camacho's brother, is the lovely "morning beach," always crowded between ten o'clock and two but comparatively deserted thereafter. I have never fully understood what is wrong with this glorious *playa* in the afternoon, since the sun is by no means bad, but it seems to lose its multi-national chic at late-lunch-eon time. *La Roqueta* is an island beach reached by motor boat (for a peso round trip) from *La Caletilla*. It is much more secluded than the other and from it one may pleasantly climb to the belvedere and lighthouse on the ridge above it. *Los Hornos* (The Ovens) "are" the afternoon beach, with a longer, more rugged stretch of sand than either of the others and with much bigger, though not powerful, surf. One afternoon I encountered a giggling group of young Mexican girls on the beach of *Los Hornos*. They saw me from afar and, of course, spotted me as a gringo. As I drew near one of them rushed up to me and said prettily, "Excuse me, sir. Do you know where we can buy a whale?" "No," I said, "but I think you've won your bet by asking me. Isn't that true?" Her confusion was charming to behold as she admitted in honest American, "I guess so, sir." The incident seemed to me part and parcel of the relaxed gaieties of Acapulco.

From the wharf at the *Zócalo* one may rent a launch (for the impressive sum of fifty dollars) and go out to the open sea in search of sailfish. Many a tourist thinks this sport

worth a "half century" but an adventure that is quite as exciting in its way and which may be achieved for a tenth of the cost is the short motor trip northward along the coast to Pie de la Cuesta. This "Foot of the Mountain" is actually a strip of sandy shore with a lagoon on one side and magnificent breakers of the open sea on the other. The inn proprietor, Ben Todd, and his Mexican wife are famous "props" of this widely known but unspoiled beach. Their fame, however, must yield to that of a still greater "celebrity"—*La Puesta del Sol de la Pie de la Cuesta*—which is a fanciful title for the finest sunset to be seen on the Mexican Pacific.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### *To Puebla and the Fort of Flowers*

#### A. CHOLULA AND ITS CALENDAR OF CHURCHES

NATIONAL highway Number 2 leads over the lofty pass on the flank of snow-crowned "Ixtaci" and so through Cholula (76 miles) and Puebla (84 miles) to a fork that carries on by two routes to Vera Cruz. The southern route passes through Tehuacán (160 miles; with the palatial spa of *Garci Crespo*), Orizaba, Fortín (210 miles), and ancient Córdoba, and so, with a sudden decline from paved to poor dirt road, the remaining few miles to the gulf port. One of the few good bus services in Mexico is the so-called Pullman line running between Mexico City (36 Calle Academia) and Córdoba. As on other first-class lines, only reserved seats are sold, so there will never be mad scrambles and never massed standees. (We may interpolate an important travel thought here, reminding ourselves that in coming from the capital we have been on the Pan-American Highway, which, however, strikes off from Puebla and continues south to Oaxaca.)

Cholula is a sort of ganglion of villages with 160 churches whose polychrome tiled domes illumine the countryside for miles around. It will be recalled that Cortés vowed to replace each of the 400 heathen teocallis hereabouts with a Christian Church (see Chapter 5) but he and his descendants have done well to miss the mark by only sixty percent. The most conspicuous of the churches, and one of the least

beautiful, rises from the large pre-Aztec pyramid on the edge of the chief village. This pyramid was erected to honor Quetzalcoatl and the basic reason for the choice of its site is of prime interest. The gentle god, who was born of a virgin in a far eastern land(!), had incurred the wrath of some more potent god on the Mexican plateau and had been forced to "leave the premises." In doing so, he halted for a matter of twenty years in Cholula, teaching the arts of civilized living to the people of the region. Then he continued to the coast and set sail in a magic boat of serpents' skins for his mythical eastern home, vowing to return one day and liberate his people. When he finally did return he had transformed himself, as we have seen, into the doughty warrior, Hernán Cortés. Mexico has dramatized this transformation by naming the lofty and handsome mountain which looms above Cholula and Puebla—La Malinche!

Convoyed by a guide with a lantern, one may wander through seemingly endless labyrinthine passages in Quetzalcoatl's pyramid, far beneath the church upon its crest, and wonder, as always in the presence of such monstrous works, at the patient eons of labor that must have gone into the building of it. To the humble folk who performed such immense toil, this god of the evening star, mysterious offspring of a mysterious virgin, must have been as real as any god or saint has been to any people.

#### B. THE WEATHERED WEALTH OF PUEBLA

Puebla de los Angeles, fourth city of Mexico, is the most Spanish and most Catholic city of the republic and aside from the capital it is probably the wealthiest and most learned city. Its traditional manufactures are majolica in many colors, chiefly cheerful yellows and blues, and onyx

ware; and both of these pleasant materials are very lavishly used in churches, public buildings and plazas. The city is practically awash in venerable charm and you will feel repaid for spending several days here instead of the usual three hours of the agency trips. The *Colonial* is the most modern hotel but the *Italia*, at a corner of the central plaza, is more Spanish and, therefore, more Pueblan. Maximilian and Carlotta are supposed to have used it as a retreat and the place is full of huge old oil paintings, gilt mirrors, plush sofas and assorted nineteenth-century bibelots. The initials M and C are even intertwined in the glass doors of the elevators but this seems pleasantly apocryphal. We suspect that when the emperor and empress went upstairs to the imperial bedroom (now proudly shown to visitors by the proprietress) they walked!

The sights of the great and various Puebla of the Angels are so delightful and unusual that they cry to be seen, but some of them are elusive if one has engaged no guide. A good city plan is needed and one is to be found in the Mexican Tourist Association's brochure called *Puebla*. The layout of the city is most important, if one would browse unescorted. Since many existing maps (but not that in the brochure) give only the outmoded block-by-block names, advance mastery of the present system will be worth while. It is actually simple, though wording it is awkward. The main streets of the city, intersecting the central plaza, have traditional names but virtually all the others have numbers. The east-west thoroughfare is *Avenida Reforma* (in its more important portion); the north-south thoroughfare is *Avenida Cinco de Mayo* north of the plaza, *Avenida 16 de Septiembre* south of the plaza. The plaza itself is the dividing point for the numbered streets. North (*Norte*) and South (*Sur*) streets have odd numbers west of the plaza, even numbers east of

it; East (*Oriente*) and West (*Poniente*) streets have odd numbers south of the plaza, even numbers north of it. The text hereinafter will anglicize addresses, but the sights are so numerous that even the chief ones can only be catalogued.

1. The *Cathedral*, second in size and importance to that of Mexico City, is a massive and somewhat gloomy affair whose interior is relieved by much Puebla onyx, including a great gray altar by Manuel Tolsa.

2. The *Biblioteca Palafoxiana* (entered from a courtyard at 5 Calle 5 Poniente, which is to say 5 West 5th Street, just back of the cathedral) is one of the most wonderful old libraries of incunabula in the world. Its three-tiered shelves of carved cedar, its worn brick floor, its gold-leaf "altar," its onyx-and-inlay tables, combine with its remarkable literary treasures to make it a venerably glamorous masterpiece. I have never seen its equal save in the Benedictine Abbey library of Admont in Styria, which is lavish and exuberant, whereas this of Puebla is mellow, reserved and cedar-brown. Among its more valuable old tomes, seen under glass, you will find a beautifully illuminated Bible which may test your Latin nicely. These are its opening words: *In Principio Creavit Deus Celum Et Terra. Terra Autem Erat Inanis Et Vacua*. Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza gave this library and many other benefactions to seventeenth-century Puebla.

3. The *Santo Domingo Church* and its *Rosary Chapel* (on Av. Cinco de Mayo, three blocks north of the main plaza) is an amazing ensemble of glittering and almost pagan ornament. Nothing else quite so artistically voluptuous exists in Mexico.

4. The *Hidden Convent of Santa Mónica* (far north on Av. Cinco de Mayo, corner of West 18th Street) is the most curious in Latin America. When all of Mexico's conventual

establishments were closed by the Reform Laws of Juárez, this one secretly defied the edict and kept functioning continuously for *over seventy years*, and that despite the fact that a municipal police station was located directly across the street. The façade of Santa Mónica is that of an ordinary dwelling house but its character is now openly revealed for it is a religious museum open to the public. Visitors are conducted through its trap-doors and camouflaged corridors so that they may see exactly how the convent's sixty nuns escaped when finally the federal police discovered the place in May, 1934. It is assumed that the local Puebla police, sympathetic to the sisters, simply refused to be aware of the religious neighbor-across-the-way.

Another odd note about the establishment is the origin of its name, for Santa Mónica was not a virgin! She was the mother of Saint Augustine. It seems that when the convent was founded the names of all the feminine saints were written on separate slips of paper and placed in an urn, from which receptacle one name was to be drawn at random so that Heaven might decide the weighty matter. To the consternation of all, the name of the married and motherly Mónica was first drawn by the officiating prelate. This might be a mistake of some kind, they thought, so he tried it again, and again Mónica's name emerged. A third time the same thing occurred so the prelate and the pious sisters were compelled to conclude that through some inscrutable whim the Mother of God desired this particular "matron saint" to be the convent's sponsor.

5. The *Santa Rosa Convent Kitchen* (on North 3rd Street, between 12th and 14th; a block north of where it is wrongly shown on the brochure map above mentioned) is a majolica miracle of olden times and its shiny copper pots will make you want to steal them for your own so-different kitchen.

6. *La Casa del Alfeñique* (meaning House of Almond Cake; located at the corner of East 4th and North 6th Streets) is Mexico's most famous example of secular churrigueresque. It is so strangely, impudently gay as to be beyond belief. Wait until you see this strawberry shortcake covered with whipped cream and then say if you believe it is real. Perhaps, though, entering the place will bring conviction for it is now the State Museum. Its collection of aboriginal and Spanish-colonial treasures is full of interest but the simple bed and the worn slippers of the original China Poblana will easily win first place in your attention. The "Puebla China-girl" was a Chinese princess who has become partly legendary and who is much beloved throughout Mexico. She is supposed to have been captured by slavers, brought to the port of Acapulco, sold to a wealthy but pious man and brought finally to Puebla, where she was converted to Christianity and took the name Catalina de San Juan, devoting the rest of her life to works of charity. Accepting the new and austere religion, she discarded her Oriental modes of dress and wore a rough red skirt and white blouse which have been touched up and glorified to become the present national costume. It now appears as a red skirt with a green border, embroidered with flowers, a white blouse of fine material with elaborate embroideries in many colors, much costume jewelry according to taste and a delicate shawl (*rebozo*) draped in gay fashion. There is nothing in the least austere about modern adaptations of the China-girl's coarse garments.

7. *La Compañía*, or Jesuit Church (on South 4th Street, a block east of the plaza) is a huge and bizarre affair with as strange a majolica dome as you will ever see, and with a great deal of Puebla onyx in the interior. The church is interesting chiefly as containing the marked burial place of the

China Poblana, of course under her very Christian and very Spanish name.

8. *Agua Azul* is a huge and palatial *balneario* (watering place) four or five miles south of the city. If you have your car and like warm sulphur pools and holiday crowds, the resort warrants the short trip.

The old glories of Puebla are eclipsed in the thought of many tourists by the city's unusual offerings to zealous shoppers. China Poblana costumes have of course a special appeal here, but *talavera ware* and tiles arouse the chief excitement and the workshops of such conspicuous firms as *Iriarte* and *Guevara Brothers* can be readily located with help from the hotel porter. The name of this form of majolica pottery originated in Spain, where its chief place of manufacture was Talavera de la Reina, near Toledo, but it was early introduced into Mexico and especially to the city of Puebla. It has remained a chief product of this city and is so identified with it that one cannot see good majolica anywhere in Mexico without instinctively calling it Puebla ware. Onyx is the other specialty of the city and this greenish-white chalcedony, with its darker parallel stripes, lends itself to the finest working by expert craftsmen. However, its lavish use in Puebla churches (even the floor is of onyx in the Rosary Chapel of Santo Domingo) has cheapened it somewhat and the positive prostitution of it by arcade shops of the central plaza has done much to rob a pleasant stone of artistic interest. Paper weights, inkwells, ornaments, buttons, and doodads of every sort are on sale by the thousands, and many of them have crossed Mexican and American flags painted on them, together with such ringing mottos as "My Country, My Honey" and "My Country, My Harry" (or Joe or Ben or Lois or Dorothy). If you can shut your eyes to

these horrors you will find, especially in the onyx shops just off the plaza rather than on it, some very alluring souvenirs.

#### C. FORTIN, A FLORAL MILLIONAIRE

The "Fortress" of the Flowers (Fortín de las Flores), once a wayside stronghold of the conquistadores while on their toilsome way up the sierra from Vera Cruz to the high plateau, has become the horticultural show of Mexico, far surpassing in sheer floral magnificence Xochimilco and all other competitors of longer standing. There is, in fact, nothing quite like Fortín anywhere else in Latin-America. To speak of the flowers in paltry millions is to understate the case; and, furthermore, they are not the commoner garden flowers such as petunias or marigolds, but are of the type which we buy in shops and greenhouses by the bloom or by the half dozen. Orchids, gladioli, lilies, are seen in Fortín fields by millions, but gardenias are seen surely in tens of millions.

To be less general, let us consider the *Hotel Ruiz Galindo*, which is the center and almost the sum of life in Fortín. Each table in the dining room is brightened by a huge vase of gardenias at every meal. Each of the hotel's 135 rooms, whether occupied or vacant, has a similar floral welcome at all times. And the open-air swimming pool is made to look like the dream of a spendthrift film producer by having a few thousand fresh gardenias tossed into it each morning, after yesterday's have been raked to the edge and thrown away. Swimming amid myriads of flowers, one feels like Marie Antoinette disporting in the pools of her luxuriant *hameau paysan*.

That story of putting vases of gardenias into vacant rooms is a tall one, you will say, and I thought so, too, when I



heard it. To see whether it was truth or fable I once pretended dissatisfaction with my room and got a lackey to show me some six or eight vacant rooms (it was out of season and the hotel was only two-thirds full) which I said might suit me better. Sure enough, every one was decorated with a vase or bowl of the fragrant white flowers. "What is the idea of such lavishness?" I asked him casually. "Why not wait until a room is taken before filling it with flowers?" "We have to be ready," he explained quietly; and so he earned a peso and I earned the knowledge that a thing like this can happen outside of a Hollywood fantasy or a queen's playground.

The Ruiz Galindo is the official permanent headquarters of the Inter-American Hotel Association and one can very well understand why the sophisticated *hoteleros* of twenty-one Americas should agree on this as their common gathering place, but you and I have come without waiting for a convention or a directors' meeting. If we have made the trip from the capital or Puebla by motor we have passed the equally sumptuous, but far less attractively located, Garci Crespo (at Tehuacán) and then plunged over the plateau's edge to descend by a score of hairpin turns to Orizaba, Fortín, Córdoba, all valley towns at a modest 3000-foot level, but dominated by Mexico's loftiest mountain, the superb peak of Orizaba, which mounts to the prodigious height of 18,225 feet. Those who have come by the night train of the *Ferrocarril Mexicana* from the capital's Buenavista Station have been delighted to find that their sleeping car was shunted to a siding at Fortín and left there, permitting them to finish out their sleep until eight o'clock.

Fortín is more than a resort. It is an experience. It is more than luxury-at-ease in the international style. It is a story to tell when you get home.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Wonders of Oaxaca*

#### A. PLAZA LIFE AT ITS BEST

OAXACA (pronounced Wah-háh-cah) is the "farthest south" of most visitors to Mexico and it makes a fitting climax to any tour, for its background is immense, its present glows with soft allure and its future, tied to that of the Pan-American Highway, which reached it in 1944, is full of practical promise. One of the best equipped service garages in Mexico is near the city's northern entrance and it seems that half of the ambitious young Mexicans one meets talk of opening up a shop in Oaxaca, or perhaps a motor camp or *loncheria* (steakery). No doubt tourist inundations will rob the city of its pristine character as a capital of Zapotec and Mixtec civilization, past and present, but much of its special charm will be indestructible.

The history of the Valley of Oaxaca is a pageant in itself. The Zapotecs probably built the great structures on the acropolis of Monte Alban above the city and also those of Mitla, twenty-five miles to the southeast, but Mixtec incursions confused these regions. The Aztecs later surged into the valley and then came the Spanish conquistadores. The whole region was granted by the Spanish crown to Hernán Cortés and thence came his sounding but inappropriate title (for he preferred Cuernavaca), Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca. Three centuries after the arrival of the conquerors came the

Great Reformer. Benito Juárez was a pure Zapotec Indian native of the city. He became a school teacher here and then a professor of law. One of his students was another young Indian named Porfirio Díaz who was destined to be the very opposite of a social reformer.

A city with so vast a background could not fail to be interesting but Oaxaca is much more than a museum of past wonders. I think its plaza life is the most appealing in all Mexico, not even excepting that of Guadalajara. These pleasures can be reached and experienced with such ease that one rather wonders at the tardiness of tourism in taking full advantage of them. A major airline (Pan-American's Mexican affiliate C.M.A.) has long served Oaxaca, making the trip from Mexico City in less than two hours. A minor and very queer but passable narrow-gauge rail line also serves the city. Toy trains with toy sleeping cars leave the little San Lázaro Station in the capital every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5:00 P.M. and they pretend to reach Oaxaca at 8:10 the next morning, but they do rather well to pull in by noon. It is a very pretty ride so one does not care too much if the train dawdles all along the way. This service will inevitably improve, in reaction to the increasing competition of the Pan-American Highway which now galvanizes life in the whole valley.

The plaza life is a double life for there are two large plazas lying corner to corner, the Zócalo or Plaza Mayor, and the Alameda. The Zócalo is, of course, the chief one and it is very large. On three sides it is flanked by spacious portales with the usual shops, the usual evangelistas and very *unusual* cafés. There are astonishingly few attractive outdoor cafés in the Mexican republic, considering how the climate encourages such relaxation. One would expect to find thousands of them in the manner of France or Austria but, barring hotel

terraces, there are scarcely a dozen good ones in the whole country. Two or three of them are under the arcades of Oaxaca's Zócalo, which is in itself one of the pleasantest of siesta parks.

I have mentioned that three sides of this central square are flanked by arcades. The fourth is graced by the cathedral and a very large luxury hotel bearing the name Marqués del Valle in honor, presumably, of the first marquis of the valley. Perhaps it will even be open by the time you reach Oaxaca but the first two or three years of its life have been spent in echoing emptiness, for the hotel was long ago finished except for certain little essentials like wiring. It was much more than a "socle" but less than a going establishment. If this really impressive place is not open, two other hotels of good quality are available, the *Ruiz* and the *Monte Alban*. The *Ruiz*, at the southeast corner of the Zócalo, has seemed to capture most of the small American trade and the life of its lobby is America-on-tour.

## B. TWO DOUBLE STARS FOR STROLLING

Of two dozen interesting sights of Oaxaca two stand out so brilliantly that they dim the others. These are, as you have guessed, a church and a museum, but *this* church and *this* museum are wonders of Mexico.

The *Church of Santo Domingo* is the one mentioned in Chapter 16 as the only one in the country capable of rivaling in baroque splendor the smaller church of Santa Rosa de Viterbo in Querétaro. Together with its adjoining monastery it forms a huge medieval fortress with immensely thick walls built to resist the frequent earthquakes of the region, but once inside the church one forgets the fortress aspect for this is altogether as gay and giddy a spectacle, for

a Christian house of worship, as the mind can possibly cope with. There are, for instance, two "genealogical trees" on the ceilings of the organ loft and the main entrance. The branches spread out like the spreading chestnut tree and its leaves are of glistening gold. Amid this mass of aureate foliage are the busts of numerous saints, diminishing in size at the top until the uppermost ones are mere faces peeping out coyly or slyly from the tangled leaves. The Virgin is, of course, the central figure in both of these quaint trees.

The sight is enough to dazzle the eyes yet the Santo Domingo ensemble is considerably less rich than once it was. This is supposed to have cost thirteen million pesos, but unhappily it was desecrated on two or three occasions by being used as a military stable, and vandalism reached a shocking peak when some of the French troops who had imposed Emperor Maximilian on Mexico used it as a barracks. They smashed off part of the reredos for firewood, removed valuable religious paintings and used the canvas for sacking and, of course, chipped off large amounts of the thick gold leaf just for fun. This sort of thing has been the traditional sport of troops of occupation in many countries in many periods of history. Europe's churches offer scores of examples, as, for instance, Santa Maria delle Grazie of Milan where Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* was defaced by Napoleon's cavalry to while away a boresome evening or two.

The *Museo Regional de Arqueologia* of Oaxaca State is every whit as interesting, in its smaller way, as is the National Museum in the capital, and it is far more intimate and more attractive to the eye. It contains as its chief feature numerous plaques, religious decorations, urns, household and personal articles exhumed by archeologists from the ancient Zapotec and Mixtec tombs of Monte Alban and no such thrilling collection of small wonders is to be seen

in the Aztec areas of Mexico or in the Maya areas of Yucatán and Guatemala. Even Peru, with all the gold wealth of the Incas as background, can muster no such miracles of craftsmanship. The articles are chiefly of pure gold but there are others of green and gray jade, of amber, of obsidian, which is volcanic glass, of rock crystal and quartz, and there is even a case of real pearls that once adorned the great ladies of aboriginal Oaxaca. One of the pearls, a beautiful oval of enormous size, bulks hardly less than a pecan nut.

By far the richest cache of treasures on Monte Alban was found as recently as 1932 by the Mexican archeologist, Professor Alonso Caso. This was the world-celebrated Tomb 7, which yielded no less than five hundred separate items, many of them of very great intrinsic as well as artistic worth. It is said that when Professor Caso found it, quite by accident in connection with the building of a new road to the summit of the hill, he was literally struck dumb for this was the event that happens once in the lifetime of one archeologist in a thousand. His wife and two Indian helpers were with him and they spent twenty-four consecutive hours, without sleep, delving into this almost unparalleled treasure house. Tomb 7 is thought to have been built originally by the Zapotecs and to have been appropriated by the Mixtecs and used as a special royal tomb. The bones of nine celebrities (presumably kings and high priests) were found here. The relics of this special tomb, lodged for a time in the National Museum in Mexico City, are now in a special room in this Oaxaca Museum and one may spend absorbed hours examining them. For once museum attendants are neither over-officious nor tip-hungry. You may browse at will, asking them questions only if you wish to do so. The gold masks of the various Mixtec gods, and especially that of Xipetotec, the god of jewelers, will perhaps capture your first and great-

est interest. This latter, once covered with human skin to transfer the god's blessing of craftsmanship to human artificers, is a work of magnificent intricacy. The visitor feels like offering a libation to the jewelers' god. He was by no means a handsome fellow but his inspiration was certainly effective.

#### C. MONTE ALBAN AND MITLA

The two great archeological sites of the Oaxaca Valley are easy to visit and are of supreme interest, quite aside from the treasures which they contained before looters and then authorized archeologists removed so many of them. Monte Alban was probably initiated by archaic peoples, developed by the Zapotecs and captured by the Mixtecs only a few decades before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. Mitla is a legacy of dubious origin stoutly ascribed to the Zapotecs —by present Zapotecs.

Monte Alban, reached by an easy paved road, would be worth visiting for its superlative view even if it had no structures of early America. One may wander at will among the temples and public buildings on the meadow-like summit, picking wild verbena but avoiding the poisonous weed called *mala mujer* (bad woman). The blossoms of the *casahuate* trees fleck the hill's sides with patches of white and this effect did, as a matter of fact, suggest to the conquerors the name White Hill, which is Monte Alban. Its original name was Oseotepec, meaning Tiger Hill Town. The word *tepec*, recurring frequently in place names of southern Mexico (not to mention Chapultepec in the capital) means Hill Town and one of the buildings on Monte Alban illustrates this rather neatly. The hieroglyphics of the astronomical observatory record various captured towns of the region and in most cases the symbol for hill is part of the name. Four such

towns seen in these sculptured records and still more or less prominent on the map of modern Mexico are Ixtepec (Flint Knife Hill); Tolstepec (Rabbit Hill); Caltepec (House Hill); Chiltepec (Pepper Hill).

Among the undeciphered carvings exhaustively studied by Professor Caso, the very numerous stories representing human deformities constitute the most mysterious. Unlike the depicting of conquered kings upside down, which was a common way of humiliating a defeated monarch, these strange deformities are beyond the present grasp of scholarship. Cripples of every sort are in conspicuous evidence. Bodies are bent or contorted, heads are squashed down between the shoulders, arms are knotted, legs bowed and feet twisted. They are on the oldest parts of the wall constructions and are considered to be even pre-Zapotec. Were the men who persistently sculptured these cripples indulging in mockery of beaten foes? Or were they, as Professor Caso seriously suggests, perhaps publicizing miraculous healing powers of the gods of Tiger Hill? The subject is a fascinating one and no doubt the primitive glyphs accompanying these carvings tell the story. We may hope that some day they will be read like Spanish or English inscriptions.

Mitla yielded no jewels of importance (the Spanish colonials are thought to have looted the tombs) but the architecture equals in interest anything found in Mexico or in all Latin-America. It was the City of Repose, or Death, as its name literally says, yet the Indians of Mexico have always thought rather pleasantly of death and this civic sarcophagus suggests nothing gloomy. Mitla's palaces of the departed are hard-stone structures of very great stability laid out with enormous corridors whose chief glory is a type of stone mosaic walls seen nowhere else. The individual stones are very small but not minuscule. Most of them are a few inches in



length, one inch or less in thickness, but they are cut in curious geometrical fashion and are fitted together, without mortar, to form a fretted pattern or frieze as perfect as the massive walls of Inca masonry in Cuzco. This seems far to surpass Cuzco in "mass craftsmanship" because the individual blocks at Mitla are numbered in the tens of thousands yet each one had to be chiseled with as much care as if it had been a two-ton block. And the whole work is achieved with such consummate skill that one would think it all had been done by an individual master craftsman.

The Mitla trip has much more than mighty ruins to recommend it. On the outward or homeward trip you will presumably stop at *Tlacolula* to see the quaint church of the farmers' saint (San Isidro) and to see the reeking market of the village. I think the adjective is moderate but let it not deter you from seeing Tlacolula's market for this is one of the most colorful in Mexico. You can pick up almost anything here, including a live armadillo "dillowing in his armor." And you will *see* almost everything, probably including a pop vendor intended to look like Edgar Bergen carrying a puppet intended to look like "Carlos Macartí;" and a wandering mendicant who carries a tiny statue of the Virgin from stall to stall, permitting the market women to kiss it (to stimulate trade) and to give him a *centavito* in recompense. You will halt, perhaps on the homeward trip, to see the giant *ahuehuatl* tree (cousin to the patriarchs in Chapultepec Park) at *Santa Maria del Tule*. It is supposed to have been 1600 years old when Cortés was marquis of the valley. It now is more than four centuries older than that and the circumference of its trunk—but you cannot believe this until you see it—is over 150 feet. It requires twenty-five men, each with a good "wing spread," to form a circle around it, fingertips touching. The height, according to the

inscription, is 140 feet and the weight of its trunk 600 tons. If your mind rejects figures as big as that just leave it to the testimony of your senses and roll along homeward.

Perhaps you will learn that a fiesta is in progress in some nearby village such as Zimatlán or Ocotlán and if so a side trip to see the rich rural pageantry of Zapotecs and Mixtecs (compare Chapter 5) will recompense you a hundredfold. These gorgeous drama-dances are presented with no thought of tourists and we find ourselves utterly ignored as we stand in the crowd watching. This is as it should be, and rarely is, in the more picturesque parts of foreign lands.

If fiestas fail you there is always the free show of the arcade cafés on the city's Zócalo. Oaxaca is the home and habitat of mezcal but you will need no fiery beverage to paint the scene in dreamy colors. A glass of mild sangría will do the trick or even that popular pop so quaintly pronounced *oranhay kroosh* (orange crush). The pleasant plaza life of this most languorous of towns will build its own engaging dreams of times far past and of travel lures ahead. Occasionally the mind may even harbor a passing thought of this quite perfect present.

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## CHAPTER XX

### *The Lodestone of Memory*

MEMORIES of a visit to an appealing foreign country merge inevitably into plans for one's next visit and they form perhaps the strongest element in the magnetism of Mexico or any Latin land. It is an agreeable pastime to let oneself be drawn by the lodestone of memory into specific recollections of big days and their small events. The most insistent things are likely to be those of least consequence except to the person—yourself or myself—who happens to have witnessed them and shared in them. By way of illustration I shall let a few of my own memories, unguided and unrehearsed, find their way into words. Here they are, crowding upon me, I fear, in somewhat disorderly fashion. I think of things like these:

A mural by Juan O'Gorman in Mexico City's airport, depicting *La Conquista del Aire por el Hombre* (The Conquest of the Air by Man). Featured in the fresco are such pioneers as Montgolfier, the Wright Brothers, Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.

A self-translating proclamation inviting the populace of Mexico City to protest against a new law: MAGNA MITIN (Meeting) y CLAMOROSA MANIFESTACION.

A common advertising sign of SOSTEN-BUSTOS VENUS. The goddess of love is shown, sure enough, with a "bra" sostén-ing her busto.

The origin of the word *machete*, as stated by a Mexican

guide. It is a corruption, he solemnly asserted, of *Massachusetts*, where the deadly knife was first made for export to sugar-cane countries. Now they come from Connecticut.

"Is Xochimilco a dairy?" queried an earnest woman tourist of this same guide. He was puzzled by such a question and she explained, still in dead earnest, "Well, I thought it might be an advertising form of *Xochi Milk Company*."

*El Arbol de la Noche Triste*, a cypress tree seen just north of the capital. It is supposed to have been under this tree that Cortés, weeping in bitterness at the slaughter of his comrades on the Sad Night (June 30, 1520), counted the survivors and began to plan for the reconquest of the Aztec capital.

A more cheerful sight in the Acolman Monastery a few miles farther out. It is a pious painting of the Virgin and she wears a huge picture hat, obviously of French design. It is pink and blue with a showy white ostrich plume.

A conspicuous sign in the Basilica of Guadalupe, typical of Indian thought: *Santa María de Guadalupe, Reina de México, Ruega Por Tu Nación*. (Queen of Mexico, Intercede for Thy Nation.)

The Virgin in the pathetic ash-laden church of Parangaricutiro. The Indians pray that she will bring back not only the corn fields but the quince and peach orchards for which the region was famous.

The curious lava fences of Michoacán, built by Tarascan contemporaries of William the Conqueror. They run off at odd tangents for miles on end and seem to serve no purpose. Students do not know why they were built.

Two questions and responses that present Mexico. Said I, with impatience, to a bus driver, "When do we start?" Said he, with resignation, "*Quien sabe?*" Said I to a plane pilot,

"Will you make connections at Torreón?" Said he, "Sure I will maybe."

A plumbing note, apropos of nothing. In provincial hotels if you turn on the faucet marked with the letter C you almost always get hot water (if there is any) and in turning the one marked H you get cold water. This hardware is imported from the States and all Mexican plumbers instantly recognize that C stands for *Caliente* (hot). The H is a puzzle but it can only serve for the other faucet.

The opals of Querétaro offered in handfuls by dubious-looking vendors at the station and the hotel. The whole region abounds in opals and good ones may be picked up cheap—by those who know opals!

An antiquated and very grimy freight engine seen in the Querétaro railway yards bearing a name in big blue letters: CARMELITA. The poor old girl was a tired hunk of junk but she still plodded on and dragged big loads.

The eternal sugar-cane of third class train travelers. One cane, cut into ten-inch lengths, will keep an Indian family contented all day—and even a short journey takes that long.

Three churches of three different centuries clustering together in Cuernavaca. Their architecture shows the evolution of Mexican Christianity from the fortress-like grimness of the sixteenth century to the easy flamboyance of the eighteenth.

The winged Madonna seen in the cathedral at Cuernavaca. This odd conception is not uncommon in Mexican churches.

Morning-glories by the acre seen in December in the roadside meadows on the way to Taxco. If there was one of these flowers there were a thousand times a million.

The tangled water pipes of Taxco's upper reaches. They lie in wondrous disarray on open streets and steep paths.

Two pretty little Taxco girls of nine or ten, each begging me for a *cigarro*. (The word means *cigarette*; a cigar is a *puro*.) Too surprised to weigh the matter, I complied and off they went, each lighting her "fag" and dragging at it happily. In a moment their six-year-old brother was at my side. "*Cigarro, señor?*"

The fiesta seen at lost Landa, a tiny hamlet in a valley beyond the crest of a hill above Taxco. From everywhere the Indians poured in as if by magic. Religion, fireworks and pulque made a happy trio.

Two large trained snakes used as guards on a sugar plantation near Orizaba. Their function is to halt trespassers and lash them with sinuous tails.

A filled tooth in an ancient skull in Puebla's State Museum. The filling seemed to be of jet.

The wonderful vase of *crystal de roco* in Oaxaca's museum fashioned by pre-Cortés Indians. Rock crystal is so hard that it poses severe problems to present-day lapidaries with all their modern instruments. How could primitive Mixtecs possibly have made this object with knives of flint or obsidian!

Some modern bivalves of the type which made the ancient pearls shown in this same museum. They are labelled *Margaritifera (molusco)*, thus proving that what we have always heard is scientifically true. A pearl is a margaret!

The singing chambermaids of Hotel Los Flamings in Acapulco. Seeming utterly unaware of the patron, these Indian nightingales lustily sang a plaintive song of many verses as they made my bed. It was all about a handsome fellow named Felipe.

A Ford beachwagon seen chasing the burros off of the Acapulco air field just before the Mexico City plane landed. It was touch and go but Lizzie nipped their heels in earnest.

